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THE DEAD DETECTIVE'S DOUBLE.

By Gerald Carlton,

AUTHOR OF "MARK MERITON'S MONEY," "THREE
HEARTS OF GOLD," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A STARTLING INTERRUPTION.

"CAN I have lost myself? This is the road the Colbeck tailor directed me, unless the storm has taken me out of my path. Whew! what a fearful night!"

And the speaker, a young, powerfully-built man, strode over the dark road with increased energy.

The hoarse roaring of the thunder boomed continuously overhead, while the narrow road, lit by many a brilliant flash, seemed to increase in darkness.

But, this did not trouble the traveler so much as the thought that he had missed his way—had, in fact, taken the wrong road.

His journey this boisterous night was one of

SUDDENLY A PORTION OF THE WALL SLID BACK, AND THE MYSTERIOUS DEAD
DETECTIVE'S DOUBLE APPEARED AT THE OPENING.

considerable importance. He had traveled through various States of the Union to locate a notorious band of crooks and counterfeiters, who were said to have their principal stronghold in Western New York; and having effected one arrest, a few miles from Pitcairn, Pa., he had got information which had led him thus far in his quest.

Gyles Garnett was no green hand in detecting crime, and Western criminals had ample cause to fear his strong arm and subtle brain.

But, here he was—a stranger to his surroundings—exposed to a furious storm, and not sure that he was on the right track.

"The Colbeck man, if I recollect," said Garnett, "alluding to a two-story frame building, within a hundred yards of a wooden bridge. This bridge spans a stream. I am sure I hear the hoarse roar of a great volume of water in the distance."

So on he hurried with revived hope, breasting the fierce winds and drenching downpour.

After crossing the bridge he was told that a mile further up the road was a tavern, where he could obtain rest and refreshment for the night.

"It had no enviable reputation"—said the tailor—but that information affected Garnett little.

The roar of water grew louder as he proceeded.

There was no mistaking the existence of the creek—a sudden and very vivid flash of lightning, smiting the surrounding darkness, disclosed, fifty or sixty yards ahead, the two-story frame building alluded to.

It was a ramshackle house, evidently unoccupied.

Passing the frame building the detective reached the bridge.

The rushing waters beneath seemed to threaten the old structure with speedy destruction.

The timbers creaked and trembled as he stepped on the bridge.

He was about to move across more hurriedly, when a brilliant flash of lightning, followed by a deafening crash of thunder, riveted him to the spot.

An exclamation of horror escaped him, for there, against the parapet of the bridge, stood a human figure.

The face was ghastly beyond expression, the eyes glassy and starting from their sockets, the hair bedraggled in mud and rain; coat, vest and shirt, torn apart, disclosed several wounds, any one of which would have proved fatal.

The glimpse was merely momentary—intense darkness succeeding quickly the lightning's flash.

It had revealed to the detective what, without doubt, had been a dreadful murder. It had revealed, indeed, more—that the murdered man's ghastly features were known to him!

All thought of the dangerous bridge was forgotten in that period of excited horror.

"My God!" gasped the young man the instant he had found voice. "It is poor Joe Fales, of the Chicago Agency. He was on the same quest as myself. They have murdered him! What's to be done?"

He concluded to examine the body more closely. It might furnish a clue as to the perpetrators of the crime.

To this purpose he produced a dark lantern—an important article of his outfit—and one which he invariably carried with him.

The cap was slid back. A brilliant light shot from the lantern, and flooded the motionless but ghastly form.

The first glance brought a startled cry from the detective's lips.

The body had been secured by a stout cord passed around the waist, to the decaying woodwork of the bridge, and tied to two iron clamps at the back, which had only been recently fixed there.

At the murdered man's feet was a bowie-knife, imbedded in the worm-eaten planking.

To this was attached a written scrawl.

The detective had no trouble in withdrawing the knife.

Holding the limp, blurred paper so that the light fell upon it, he deciphered the following:

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN!

"This man was warned what to expect, if he insisted in shadowing members of our band. He did so, after having the dangers of such a proceeding plainly set forth. Being caught, he was adjudged guilty and sentence of death was carried into effect. Let this be a warning to others similarly inclined, as the same fate awaits them, one and all!"

To this murderous document was appended a rude drawing of a death's head and cross-bones. "Poor Fales!" muttered Garnett, sadly, "they

have done for you. Now to take warning and meet craft with craft—which you, poor fellow, failed to do."

Heedless of the fierce buffets of the storm, or the swaying of the old wooden bridge, the detective cut the cords that secured the murdered man to the iron clamps, and lifting the body in his arms he carried it across the bridge.

He had not cleared the shaking structure an instant too soon. With a thunderous crash the swaying timbers parted, and the rotten woodwork was swept away on the bosom of the now turbulent torrent.

Gyles realized then the terrible danger he had escaped, and stood for several seconds as if transfixed.

"That was a narrow shave," he said, shudderingly; "a moment later and no earthly power could have saved me. It's well it has gone. They will think the body was swept away with it."

While thus reflecting, his gloomy surroundings were lit vividly. The dripping sky seemed one mass of living fire.

Fifty yards or so from where the detective stood he saw a small thicket, covering, apparently, three or four acres of ground and bordering one side of the road.

Garnett bore the body in its direction.

"I can conceal the body among the undergrowth," he said, "and, later on, come back and give it Christian burial. Time enough to think of avenging him."

Passing out of the highway in among the trees of this thicket, he selected by the aid of his lantern, a spot where there was a dense growth of underbrush.

"This will do," he muttered, as he hid the body in the center. "There's little chance of its being found until I return."

Leaving certain marks by which he could identify the spot easily, he made his way back into the road, and trudged forward again.

It was now about half-past twelve.

"This is the inn," thought Garnett, as he came up to a rambling building, which he at once surveyed critically.

"I have no doubt but it will be equal to its reputation, which, according to my Colbeck friend, is none of the best. Fortunately I took every precaution before leaving the village to look as much like a 'crook' as possible. They will never suspect me of being other than what I represent myself—a New York cracksmen."

A couple of windows on the lower floor of the building were brightly illuminated, which went to prove that its inmates had not yet retired.

Suddenly snatches of a drinking song, followed by a chorus of several voices, came faintly into the night.

The detective listened.

He judged there were five or six men in the house—perhaps some of the counterfeiters, of whom he was in search.

When the last words of the refrain had died away, he went up to the building only to find the door closed, but he knocked loudly.

A sudden hush followed—not a sound in the whole house.

An instant later the door was partly opened, and a pair of keen eyes glared out at him.

"Who are you? What do you want?" demanded a gruff voice.

"Shelter for the night."

The door was thrown open. A burly-looking man appeared and, regarding his visitor suspiciously, said:

"All the beds are engaged, boss."

"Never mind about the beds, mister," cheerily rejoined the detective. "A hot stove's good enough for me, where I can dry my togs—for I'm drenched and chilled to the bone."

The man hesitated, as if reflecting whether he should close the door or invite the traveler inside.

"Where do you hail from?" at last he inquired.

"York."

"York?" eying the detective with increased suspicion. "You've chosen a pretty rough night for traveling, friend. Where are you bound?"

"The tavern of one Bill Mathews—*The Maggie*, my pard called it. I was told Bill was as white a man as you could scare up. Perhaps you could tell me where his crib is, mister?"

The man broke into a hearty laugh.

"What's the name of this part of yours?" he asked more graciously. "Perhaps I might happen to know him."

"You?"

"Yes—why not me? What if I'm Bill, and this *The Maggie*?"

"Then I should say I'm in luck," answered

Garnett. "Bob Belcher's my pard's name. And you're Bill Mathews, eh? *Shake!*"

The detective, in his pretended warmth, seized the man's hand.

"See here, young fellow," said Mathews, "what's your name, anyhow?"

"Harry Bluff."

"Can't say as I've heard Bob mention that name," declared Bill, thoughtfully. "However, I reckon it's all right, and if agreeable, I'll introduce you as Belcher's pal to as jolly a set as you'd scare up. Come inside."

Garnett, accepting the invitation, passed into the tavern.

The landlord secured the door, then led the way along the passage, which was unlighted.

He did not go far when he stopped and threw open a door, through which streamed a flood of light, revealing a tolerably large room, wherein a coal fire burned brightly in an old-fashioned grate at one side.

Within comfortable distance of it sat five men—all in the prime of life, comfortably clad and intelligent looking.

As the door opened, all eyes were turned to it.

Garnett's quick glance failed to recognize any of the occupants, who might pass, from external appearances, for well-to-do citizens.

But Gyles was not deceived.

"Members of the band," he mentally concluded. "Their appearance makes them the more dangerous."

The detective had obtained his information of Mathews from Belcher, in New York.

The men regarded the detective suspiciously as he stood in the open doorway.

"It's all right, boys," explained the landlord, cheerily. "This is Mr. Harry Bluff—a pard of my old friend, Bob Belcher. He's been traveling here through the storm—so make a place for him at the fire."

Bill's introduction was sufficient, and Garnett was invited to join the company.

Liquor and cigars were called in and numerous inquiries made as to matters in New York—all of which the detective answered satisfactorily.

"Crooked" business in the metropolis was also discussed and commented on.

Presently Garnett's suspicions were confirmed. He was hob-nobbing with members of the band of counterfeiters to whom even murder was not unfamiliar.

As glass after glass was drank, the tongues of the rascals wagged more and more imprudently, and Garnett was on the point of making an important discovery, when a heavy step was heard in the passage, and the door of the room was thrown open.

"Hello!" shouted Mathews. "Who is this?"

The men all started to their feet.

The detective turned and faced the door.

A startled cry escaped his lips—for there stood, in the open doorway, an exact presentment of the murdered detective, Joe Fales!

CHAPTER II.

WARNED.

THE unexpected apparition in the drinking room of the tavern completely sobered the company, for all recognized the features of their unwelcome visitor! It was this recognition which riveted them to the spot.

The detective was as visibly affected, as any of them.

It was impossible that it could be the Pinkerton agent, for he had only a short time before concealed a mutilated body in the thicket.

How then could he account for the appearance of this veritable double of the dead detective?

While Garnett thus wondered and stared, the weird visitor bent his eyes sternly on the speechless counterfeiters, then suddenly vanished!

The door went to with a crash, and simultaneously all present drew a breath of relief.

"This is a downright piece of jugglery," said Bill Mathews, who was the first to recover himself, "and I for one am going to find out what it means. There ain't no such thing as dead men coming back, you can bet."

"So-so," thought Garnett; "these, then, are the men who murdered Fales. I must refer to the incident of the bridge in some way, so as to satisfy them that I am what I represent myself. That cry of recognition must be accounted for."

The landlord, meanwhile, had taken a lighted lamp from a bracket, and hastening to the door he opened it and narrowly examined the dark passage from the front to the rear.

Not a soul had passed out either way.

The front door was as he had left it—bolted and locked, while the door leading to the rear

of the building was secured by a ponderous chain and bar.

Satisfied that no one could have left the inn, he re-entered the room and said:

"It seems our unwelcome visitor has vanished into air. But there is no such thing as ghost or goblin; he is as much flesh and blood as any of us."

"Then how do you account for the resemblance?" queried one of the gang, Dick Harvey by name. "His likeness to the Pinkerton spy is more than mere accident. I never saw two fellows look so much alike; yet it is out of the question they can be identical—impossible."

"It's a mystery I should like to fathom," declared another of the party.

"What's your opinion, Mr. Bluff?" asked the landlord, turning to the pseudo-"crook;" "you seemed as much taken aback as any of us. Ever see the fellow before?"

"Yes," Garnett replied, unhesitatingly, "but the man was dead. He bore a striking resemblance to the apparition—call it what you will. It was as I was journeying here through the storm."

"Where?" inquired Harvey, exchanging glances with Mathews, who, in turn, riveted his keen gaze on the supposed Bluff.

"A wooden bridge about a mile from here. But for a vivid lightning flash I should have passed on and never have seen him. As it was, I made tracks as soon as possible—glad to strike a wider and better road. It was no business of mine if there had been twenty dead men there."

Again were rapid glances passed between the members of the gang, but Garnett's explanation appeared satisfactory; it had been given with every indication of frankness.

"You are sure the resemblance was striking?"

"Oh, very much so."

"Do you believe in ghosts, Mr. Bluff?"

"Nary time. I'm inclined to coincide with your view, Bill—it was a bit of trickery; and I think a thorough search of the old house will prove I'm right."

"In that case, let's set about it at once," urged Dick Harvey. "If any fly cop or spy's putting up a job on us, the sooner we ferret him out the better. He can't be the apparition of the fellow we left on the bridge; yet," Harvey added thoughtfully, "he *does* look mighty like him."

They passed through every room of the rambling old building—but in vain; they neither saw, nor did they hear anything of their late mysterious visitor.

It was now about two o'clock.

A final drink was proposed, as some of the counterfeiters had to leave the tavern at an early hour.

Garnett had made a favorable impression, especially on Dick Harvey—nor was he slow to take advantage of it.

He had singled this man out from the first as one likely to give him a point—the important discovery we have previously hinted at—the location of the spot where the counterfeiters manufactured their bogus money.

As the detective and Harvey sat apart from the rest of the company, the former said:

"I tell you, Dick, I should like to take a hand in this lay of yours. I know lots of fellows who'd jump at the offer to turn in a few honest dollars for the queer."

"What! you ain't tired of your own biz, are you?" said Harvey, in evident surprise. "Cracking a bank occasionally pays, does it not?"

"It used to," replied the pretended "crook," lugubriously, "but it's tarnationally played out since that fly cop Byrnes, took a hand in. I tell you they'll nab a fellow now before he can look around. The good old days are gone, Dick, and you can bet on it."

"Do I understand that you'd like to join us?"

"Nothing would suit me better."

"You might think differently."

"How?"

"It's not a jolly life," said Harvey lowering his voice. "There's many a bed of thorns for the man who joins us. It's a pretty up-hill work, and there's an oath that would almost freeze the blood in your veins. If you're told to put a man out of the way, you're to do it and ask no questions. You may never have seen the victim before, and not have the slightest grudge against him, still it is your duty to obey. What do you think of removing a man in cold blood, whom you had never seen before?"

The counterfeiter's words were almost inaudible, as he bent his eyes uneasily on his companions who were engaged just then in listening to a story of the burly landlord's.

"But, then, it would be for the welfare of the band," suggested Garnett, in lowered tones.

"Not always. There are wretched mistakes

often made, whereby the wrong man is done for; that's the part of the business I don't like."

The detective was very guarded in his replies.

He did not place such implicit trust in Mr. Dick Harvey that he should coincide in all he said.

The other proceeded.

Gyles had to lean over to catch his words.

"Do you know," resumed Dick, "I believe they've made another awful mistake? They did for the wrong man last night."

Garnett gave an imperceptible start.

"Did for the wrong man," he whispered.

"What do you mean?"

"The dead man you saw on the bridge, as you came through the storm. I've been just thinking that our information was not reliable in regard to him. You see, we've a pal in Cincinnati who warned us by telegraph to be on the lookout. The dispatch was in cipher; it gave name and description of the spy, the object of his journey and when he left the Northwest. So you see we were expecting him; but, according to my calculation, he could not have reached here until to-night."

"Well, you make out by that—"

"That we have murdered the wrong man," answered Dick, huskily. "The man was felled insensible before he could say a word—and—and the stab-wounds that deprived him of life were inflicted while he was still unconscious. These mistakes are occurring by far too often," pursued Harvey with a shudder, "and I, for one, would strongly advise you to think twice before— But it is not for me to counsel you," he quickly added; "you are old enough to choose for yourself."

"The man is not so bad as I thought him," was Garnett's mental commentary. "He seems sadly out of place among this band of murderers—for that's what they are, neither more nor less."

Then he proceeded, in the same low tones, as previously:

"Have you any idea who the murdered man is?"

"Not in the least."

"But of his striking resemblance to your late visitor?"

"I cannot account for it—unless, indeed," continued Dick, "that the genuine Pinkerton agent has himself arrived—and, coming to think, I heard a rumor some little while back that this Fales, of Chicago, had a twin brother, who bore a very remarkable likeness to him."

"Indeed?"

"So it has been said. Of course I cannot vouch for it, never having seen the man."

"Is this twin brother in the same city?"

"Now, then, you have me. I'm as ignorant of that as yourself; but, I do believe this," whispered Harvey, with intense earnestness—"that the so-called apparition was human—as much flesh and blood as either of us."

"Then how could he have got away so mysteriously?"

The faintest perceptible smile covered the counterfeiter's face.

"You must understand that this is a very old building," he explained, "and there are many queer nooks and crannies of which our friend Mathews is not cognizant—such for instance as sliding panels, secret passages, one or two of which I've discovered by the merest accident."

"And no one else knows of their existence?"

"Not to my knowledge."

And you have kept the secret of your discoveries to yourself?"

"Yes; I had an object in so doing, of which, if we become pals, I'll tell you later on. For, to be square with you, Harry, I've somewhat of a sneaking regard for you; and if you are resolved to become one of us—and indeed I'd advise you not—I'll do the honest Injun by you. I think I can't say anything fairer."

"I'll vouch for that," was the detective's frank response.

"Well, to-morrow you shall be inducted as one of the band—of your own free will and option, accepting, of course, all responsibilities."

"You mean to-day," smiled Garnett, correctly, "morning has already dawned."

"By Jove you're right, it is three o'clock and time for me to be off."

The old-fashioned German time-piece, which stood opposite to them, on the wall, indicated that that was exactly the hour.

"Ten o'clock then," said Harvey, shaking Garnett's hand heartily, as he rose to go, "I'll take you straight to the crib, and arrange all the preliminaries. So long!"

"So long!" echoed Garnett. "I'll be prepared for the ordeal, you may depend."

"Oh, I have not the slightest fear of you; you'll stand it like a man."

Harvey and two more of the counterfeiters took their departure—Bill Mathews accompanying them to the front door.

So far Gyles had succeeded fairly well.

He was now convinced that Harvey was indeed sadly out of place, and Gyles could not help experiencing a feeling of regret, that the man was banded with such a gang of unconscionable scoundrels.

Bill Mathews, having seen his three guests depart, had by this time returned.

"Time for bed, boys," he announced, "if you're to have any sleep before daylight."

The two remaining counterfeiters and Garnett rose to their feet.

"I'm going to show you into a room that ain't been slept in for two years, friend Bluff," remarked Bill, laughingly. "You'll find everything, though, very comfortable; sheets and bedding perfectly aired, so no chance of catching cold. You don't believe in ghosts, of course, so you'll be as snug as a bug in a rug." And so saying he led the trio from the room.

The counterfeiters, supplied with lighted candles, shook hands with the pseudo-Harry Bluff, and smilingly wished him "a pleasant night's rest," then went in the direction of their several bed-rooms.

"That Dan Manning and his pard are bricks," declared the admiring Bill Mathews, as the two confederates disappeared, "and nothing short of it. You wouldn't believe me, now, but I'll be bound to say they are two of the most skillful engravers in the United States."

"Is that so?"

"You can bet they are."

"They do the principal work?"

"Yes, and they haven't their equals in the country," declared Mathews. "The Secret Service 'blokes' would give all they are worth if they could only get them into the toils—but, they're not that kind of hairpins—they're as fly as a wagon-load of monkeys and a dog on the box; they're two smart ones, you bet!"

"They look it."

Garnett followed the landlord up a flight of rickety stairs, and some distance along a corridor, which was narrow and badly ventilated, as the musty odor amply testified.

Mathews drew up before a stout oaken door, inserted a key in the lock and threw it open.

The bright flash of the lamp disclosed a commodious and very comfortable bedroom.

"You can sleep like a top here," he said, "with no one to disturb you, either. Here's your key—to lock yourself in, if you so desire.—And now, good-night, or rather morning—and pleasant dreams. I was forgetting one thing though—I had better leave you the light."

Garnett waved his hand deprecatingly.

"Oh, never you mind," said Bill, laughingly, as he produced a piece of sperm candle from his pocket, and, striking a match, lit it. "I'm not without the means of finding my way down stairs—and now, once more, good-night."

"Good-night," said Gyles, "and thanks."

"And now," thought Garnett, "it will be as well to snatch a few hours' sleep. I'll secure the door first, as my very good friend, Mathews, suggested; I'm afraid he's a little too sweet for his friendship to last."

He crossed to the door, closed and locked it—the key he left in the wards of the lock—turning it partly for better security.

He next examined a brace of exquisitely finished revolvers.

"They're all right," he thought; "I can rely on them. They've never missed fire yet, and I've been in many a tight fix at that."

Placing the fire-arms beneath the pillow of the bed, he was about to throw himself down in his clothes, when a peculiar, grating sound saluted his ears.

"What's that?" he asked of himself.

The strange sound was repeated—but now much more distinctly.

The detective arose noiselessly, fixing his eyes on the opposite wall, from which the sound seemed to come.

Suddenly a portion of the apparently solid wall slid back, and the mysterious Dead Detective's Double appeared at the opening.

Ere he could recover himself to rush toward the opening in the wall, a letter was thrown into the room.

It fell within a few feet of him.

Then, with sudden sharp click, the wall as suddenly resumed its original appearance.

It was all the work of a moment.

When the detective looked up from the mischievous to which his eyes had been directed as it was thrown into the room, Joe Fales's Double had vanished.

"Were I aroused from a deep sleep, I should

imagine I had dreamt it," said Garnett. "But, here is what appears to be a written communication," saying which he bent over and picked it up.

He tore open the envelope and read the following:

"You may not be aware of it, but you are in a veritable MURDER DEN; do not trust the landlord or any of his confederates; they already suspect you are not what you represent yourself. The man Belcher is on his way, from New York, and is expected to arrive by noon to-day!

"Be warned in time,
"ONE WHO WISHES YOU WELL."

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERIES OF THE OLD TAVERN INCREASE.
THE handwriting in the note did not resemble Joe Fales's.

With this the detective was personally familiar, though the face and form of his mysterious friend and those of the Pinkerton agent were strikingly alike.

"The more I ponder the matter, the more puzzled I am," soliloquized Garnett. "The reappearance of my unknown friend—for so I must esteem him—brings to mind Dick's story of the secret passages and sliding panels."

"So they already suspect me—and Mr. Bob Belcher is to be here at noon, the gent who's to put a spoke in my wheel, eh?"

"It might be well, perhaps, to go and meet him, and delay this much-desired exposure. I guess I hold the trump card yet—thanks to my unknown friend's warning."

"Hold on, though; I should like to get at the secret of that sliding panel."

Snatching the lamp from a table where Mathews had left it, he crossed to the other end of the room and examined the wall closely.

It had the appearance of being solid, but the detective knew this could not be the case.

"I guess the spring will be somewhere here," thought Garnett, as he carefully examined the lower part of the wall.

He was right, for, pressing a certain spot, there followed instantly a hollow, clicking sound, and the secret panel slid aside, disclosing a dark, narrow passage beyond.

To explore this was his immediate decision.

He returned the hand-light to the table, and securing his revolvers, lit his dark-lantern.

Making sure that the door of his apartment was secure, he went back to the opening in the wall, and unhesitatingly entered the passage.

A flood of light shot through the darkness. The walls of the passageway were of solid masonry. Above his head, with pendulous-like motion, swayed to and fro long strings of cobwebs. The air was by no means damp or unwholesome.

"It appears to be ventilated," soliloquized the detective, "and will no doubt furnish a means of escape in case of necessity."

The passage led down two narrow flights of stone steps, upon which the dust of a century seemed to have accumulated, for no sound echoed his footsteps.

"I am on the lower floor," thought Gyles, "or probably in the cellars."

"Hello!" cried he, suddenly. "What was that?"

Strange, murmuring sounds caught his ear, and he stole softly forward.

The sounds grew more distinct, finally resolving themselves into voices, and he could almost hear what was being said.

Bill Mathews's voice was plainly distinguishable. There were others with him, probably the two counterfeiters.

"There's no doubt a room close at hand," concluded Garnett, "or the voices wouldn't come so distinctly."

The detective moved now more cautiously than ever, and then closed the lantern-slide.

The passageway being now in pitch darkness, Garnett detected what seemed to be a small pencil of light breaking through the gloom. He examined the spot and discovered a small circular hole in the side of the passage, evidently not the solid stone wall, but some panel work.

Looking through the aperture he peered into a somewhat commodious room, in which were seated the burly landlord, and the two bank-note engravers—Dan Manning and his pal.

They had evidently been discussing some matter of importance, for an open letter lay before them on a table at which they were seated.

"This description, in the letter, of Detective Garnett," he heard Dan Manning remark, breaking the silence, "seems to tally with this Bluff's personal appearance. I'll run over it again:

"Detective Garnett of Chicago stands fully

six feet in height, of powerful build, twenty-three to twenty-five years old, light hair and blue eyes; expression of features—that of a resolute, determined man. Keep a keen lookout for him, as it is known among the crowd in Cincinnati that he is now in New York State, in quest of the headquarters of the band. There is one little discrepancy, however," pursued Manning. "Bluff has jet-black hair, and a somewhat swarthy complexion. I think that is the only difference."

"Not hard to change the color of one's hair," suggested Mathews. "As to his complexion a drop or two of walnut juice would so fix it that his own mother wouldn't know him."

"Nothing can be more certain," assented Manning.

"But let there be no mistake. Doing for a man on mere suspicion, ain't the thing, and it may be done once too often."

"I propose to make no move till Bob Belcher arrives. We'll then know whether Mister Bluff's an impostor or not, and deal with him accordingly."

In which decision the others concurred; and thus resolved, the three rascals left the room, taking the light with them.

CHAPTER IV.

JOE FALES'S DOUBLE.

THE detective, now placed thoroughly on his guard, slid aside the mask of his lantern, and hastily retraced his steps along the passageway.

Reaching his own room, he pressed the secret spring, and the sliding panel assumed its original appearance—a seemingly solid piece of masonry.

"And now to bed," decided the detective, well satisfied with the results of his exploration—which in a manner corroborated the warning contained in the note from Joe Fales's Double. "A few hours' sleep will prepare me for what is to come."

Extinguishing the lamp—which still burned brightly on the table—he threw himself on the bed, and was soon in a profound sleep.

When he awoke the rays of the morning sun were streaming brightly into the room.

Glancing at his watch, the detective found it wanted but a few minutes of nine o'clock.

"I'm glad I've not overslept myself," he said, as he arose from the bed.

It did not take Gyles long to complete his toilet.

This done he lit a cigar—an old morning habit of his—and settled down to think out his plans for the day.

"Belcher must be intercepted at all hazards," he resolved. "It won't do to let him reach The Magpie. I must also postpone my business with Dick Harvey until later. That much is settled."

He meant to await the arrival of the counterfeiter, and give him a plausible excuse for returning to the village of Colbeck for some articles he had left there, and of which he discovered he stood greatly in need.

Having finished his cigar, and arranged his plans to his satisfaction, he was about to hurry down, when a step in the corridor warned him of some one's approach.

He hastened softly to the door and unlocked it.

"My friend the landlord," thought the detective.

He was right, for the next instant the door opened, disclosing the burly form of Mathews.

He greeted the pseudo "crook" with a cheery "good-morning."

"I perceive you are up," he said, "and looking as fresh as a daisy. Did you sleep comfortably?"

"Never better," said the detective, smiling.

"I knew you would," declared the landlord, "especially after your disagreeable journey. And now, if you are ready come down to breakfast, as you must need something substantial after your long fast."

Bill's manner was extremely courteous and pleasant, and Garnett might have been deceived by it but for his experiences of a few hours before.

The landlord could enact the role of a gentleman whenever he chose.

In fact he had been educated for the medical profession, and gave promise of considerable success, until he took to bad company and late hours.

Gyles followed Mathews down-stairs and was ushered into a very cheery looking room, with a well supplied table—at which were seated the two bogus bank-note engravers, awaiting his

arrival, apparently, before beginning the morning meal.

As the detective entered the room they sprung up and greeted him warmly.

They appeared as eager in their inquiries as to his rest as Mr. Mathews, and while at table, it seemed as though they could not be too attentive to him.

Of course Garnett took it all in.

He was as great an adept at disguising his real feelings as they were—more so, now that he was on his guard.

During the progress of the meal he observed that the eyes of the polite counterfeiters were continuously fixed upon his face and hair.

This occasioned him little uneasiness, seeing that the work on both had been done with consummate skill.

The breakfast being finally dispatched, the four men arose from the table.

"We'll have to say good-by for the present," said Dan Manning, as he and his comrade prepared to leave the tavern. "We have business to attend to at the Hall. You'll be here to-night—of course?"

"Ay and for many a good night to come I hope," was Garnett's cheery reply—"that is if our friend Bill here doesn't see fit to turn me adrift," added he, laughing lightly.

When the bogus bank-note engravers were gone, the detective consulted his watch.

It wanted five minutes of ten o'clock.

"Five minutes more and Harvey will be here," he thought, as he sauntered into the road.

The morning was very beautiful after the storm.

The sun shone brightly—everything in nature looked fresh and invigorating.

Garnett did not forget Dan Manning's allusion to the "Hall."

"That is where the queer's manufactured," he concluded. "Some deserted old building, with the reputation of being haunted—which every one's afraid to go near. It cannot be any very great distance from here."

Dick Harvey now arrived.

There was no change in his manner toward the detective. He was just the same as he had been on their last meeting—very friendly and very frank.

"I hardly think he's one of the doubting Thomases," said Garnett to himself; "should it be so it will surprise me. Good-morning!" he cried aloud.

"The same to you," answered the counterfeiter, cheerily; "how did you sleep?"

The detective replied that he had slept very well indeed.

They met about fifty yards from the inn, and taking Harvey's arm, Garnett led him back the way he came.

He had no desire that Mathews should see him—at least not just then.

"Suppose we start for the Hall," said Dick.

"The Hall?"

The pseudo "crook" simulated ignorance of that particular place.

This brought an explanation about, as might be expected—more especially as Dick signified his intention of not returning to the inn that day.

"You don't know the 'Hall,' of course; and why should you, until you are told? The 'Hall,' pursued Harvey, "is where we carry on business—bank-note, coin, etc."

"It has a queer history, which I will tell you as we go on."

By this time they were quite out of sight of the tavern—the very thing Garnett most desired, as he had ample cause to fear an interruption from his friend, Mathews.

"I was thinking, Dick," said Garnett, confidentially, "that if you've no objection, I'd prefer postponing my visit to the 'Hall' till some other time—say to-morrow—as I've pressing business that will take me in another direction—the village of Colbeck. I left certain articles there which I find I must return for at once. Let me ask you whether this postponement will put you to any inconvenience?"

"None whatever," was the reply; "joining us will do as well to-morrow—or any other day, for the matter of that. When do you leave?"

"I should like to start at once."

"Then good luck to you," said Dick; "I shall be at Bill's place to-morrow at the same hour, and hope to find you back there, safe and sound."

"Never fear," said Garnett, lightly. "There's an old proverb of which you've, no doubt, heard, 'The devil's children have the devil's luck.'"

"Not always," said Harvey. "I've known them to come to unmerciful grief sometimes, so be careful," he added, half jocosely.

They had reached a point in the road overshadowed by tall trees, through whose interlacing branches the sunlight crept most sluggishly.

They stood here conversing for a few moments, then parted—Harvey setting out for the "Hall"—Garnett returning tavernward.

They were scarcely fifty paces apart when a man darted out from behind a large oak, and gazed after them—first one way, then the other.

On the detective's receding form his eyes rested, until an abrupt turn in the road hid him from sight.

Then the man emerged completely from the shadow, until a rift in the interlacing branches poured a flood of golden sunlight down upon him.

The face and form of this strange figure bore a marvelous resemblance to the murdered Pinkerton detective.

CHAPTER V.

SUSPICIONS ALLAYED.

GARNETT, on leaving Dick Harvey, walked slowly toward the tavern.

He was thinking seriously whether or not he should inform Bill Mathews of his intended absence till evening.

"If I leave without some excuse," he thought, "it will make him doubly suspicious. I must appear to deal frankly with him."

Another matter that struck Garnett as strange, was the entire absence at the old inn of guests, or even servants.

Mathews's only customers seemed to be counterfeits.

The reputation of the place was so unsavory that it was not likely that any respectable traveler would seek shelter there—unless, indeed, he was unfamiliar with its evil name.

Now it occurred to the detective that he had heard at Colbeck that Bill Mathews was a married man, having one child—a grown-up daughter.

Furthermore, that his wife and daughter resided with him.

Where were the women-folks?

The landlord appeared, at present, the only occupant of the rambling old inn.

Thus cogitating Gyles Garnett drew up before the building; he was not a little startled to hear female voices in apparently angry discussion.

"So my information was not incorrect," he said, as he paused for an instant before entering the inn. "This no doubt is one of those pleasant family jars, not meant for strangers."

The women had either seen the detective or heard his approach, so were on their guard—for a moment later not a sound was heard.

Gyles sauntered into the inn as though he had heard nothing.

Nor did he betray surprise at the sudden appearance of a rosy prepossessing young woman, of some nineteen or twenty years.

The new-comer was a decided brunette, with a rich olive complexion, jet-black hair, and snappy black eyes—the latter bespeaking much animation and a temper easily aroused.

She was possessed of buxom proportions; on the whole, was a fine specimen of a handsome, healthy country girl.

"So this is the daughter," thought the detective; "a fine-looking lass; too bad she should be in such a den." And then aloud: "Is Mr. Mathews around?"

The girl looked at him curiously, for a moment, without answering.

Then bursting into a merry laugh—which Gyles could see was half-forced—she replied:

"He's behind you."

"The deuce—"

Gyles stopped short, and, suddenly wheeling, saw the landlord within two paces of him.

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Mathews. "You didn't know I was so near, eh?"

The detective quickly recovered.

That he was surprised is no exaggeration.

Could it be that Bill had "shadowed" him up the road, and was an auditor of his conversation with Harvey?

He dismissed the thought as soon as formed, and echoed the other coarse laugh in a merrier mood.

"No, it did not strike me that you were so near," he frankly admitted. "But so much the better; it will save me the trouble of hunting you up."

"Indeed?"

Mathews regarded the pseudo "crook" with a cunning leer—as much as to say: "That's all right, but I'm too old a bird to be caught with chaff."

An imperious gesture to his daughter sent her within doors in a twinkling.

"So you were going to hunt me up, were you?" said Mr. Mathews, with an ill-concealed sneer. "By the way, where have you been? It would seem you know the country pretty thoroughly—for a stranger!" he added, emphasizing the last clause.

Gyles, lightly laughing, did not appear to notice the sneer, as he answered unhesitatingly: "Well, I must admit it doesn't take me long to get acquainted with country roads."

"Or city streets," put in the other. "But you just now said I saved you the trouble of hunting me up. Anything special?"

"Yes—I am going to leave you."

"For good?"

"Oh, no!" replied Gyles, in excellent humor, "only for the day. I'm off to Colbeck for some traps that I need. Back again some time to-night. In fact, I'm going to stay with you as long as you'll let me."

The tone was so frank that Mathews's suspicions were to some extent disarmed.

"I think you said you met Dick Harvey this morning?" said the landlord soundingly.

"There you are mistaken," replied Gyles. "I did not say so. But I did meet him, for all that."

"So he did shadow me," thought the detective, "and no doubt heard all that passed. Frankness is now more than ever a necessity."

Without more ado, Garnett recounted all—or nearly all—that occurred between himself and Harvey.

He could not have served his purpose better.

The landlord's suspicions were now entirely allayed—for he had heard enough to convince him that his guest was telling the truth.

In fact, he had been concealed behind some bushes during a greater part of the conversation.

"I am not sorry you have made up your mind to join us," he said; "and it will be your own fault, too, if you regret it. You say you're going to Colbeck?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll go with you."

"Nonsense! I can find my way alone."

The detective purposely misconstrued the landlord's meaning.

His wish was to avoid company as much as possible, especially the company of Mr. Mathews, who might prove a "white elephant" on his hands.

Bill had resolved to go to the village, however, so there was an end of it.

"You seem to forget that the bridge is swept away," he said. "Besides I go to meet your friend, Bob Belcher."

"Why, he is not to arrive till to-morrow," said Gyles, not in the least disconcerted.

"He told you so?"

"Yes, before leaving York."

"Then he has changed his mind," said the landlord. "He'll arrive at Colbeck some time in the early evening. So, for company's sake, we'll journey together."

Garnett seemed to hail this proposal with much satisfaction.

He was uneasy, nevertheless.

His object was to meet Belcher alone, and intercept and break his journey, if possible, until at least his plans were matured for the capture and conviction of the band of counterfeiters.

"That's my daughter, Linda, you saw a short while ago," said Mathews, to turn the subject. "A fine girl for an out-of-the-way place. But I pity the man that gets her—she's a Tartar, I can tell you. Ah, here's my wife! Let me introduce you."

They entered the inn.

In the bar they met a finely-proportioned woman, who had evidently seen better days, and who still bore traces of former beauty.

After a formal introduction and a few moments' conversation, Mathews announced that he would go and get his team ready.

Not more than a few minutes elapsed when he returned.

"All's ready!" he said. "And now we had better start."

They were on the point of leaving the room, when Garnett's gaze was suddenly fastened on the window.

A pale face and two gleaming eyes were glued to one of the panes—but for a moment only, then hastily withdrawn.

Eyes and face the detective had seen before.

An involuntary exclamation almost burst from him.

His agitation was not observed, however; and, saluting Mrs. Mathews, he followed the landlord into the open air.

"Again!" he muttered; "what danger threatens me now? It is hard to believe that apparition mortal!"

They were soon on their way to the village. Mathews was inclined to be talkative until he arrived at the spot where the bridge had spanned the swollen creek—still swollen, and dangerous, at almost any point, to ford.

The landlord was far from expecting things were so bad.

"Curse the luck!" he growled, with an oath. "Your account of the old bridge being swept away didn't surprise me; but I never expected the flood would be so strong."

And then he swore to such a degree that Garnett began to feel his flesh creep.

The detective was used to hearing the most blasphemous language—but the like of this never!

Growing quite anxious Gyles said:

"Can't we ford the creek at any point?"

"We'll have to, I guess, at the expense of a wet skin—or perhaps being swept away like the rotten old timbers of the bridge. There is a point about a mile from here, up-stream. Let's try that. We'll get a mighty good wetting anyhow."

And so they drove back some little distance—past the grove, where was concealed the mutilated remains of the Pinkerton Agency man.

Gyles could not repress a shudder as he passed this spot.

His eyes wandered furtively in the direction of the brush; and his imagination pictured the ghastly scene, as he saw it, in one of the bright flashes of the storm, the night before.

Leading from the highway, and bounding the right of the grove, was a deep-rutted lane.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DETECTIVE'S DISPATCH.

Down this lane the team plunged.

The rough country wagon jolted and rolled from side to side.

The men were silent, each immersed in his thoughts.

The detective, considering his best plan to get rid of an unwelcome companion, as the landlord was likely to prove; the latter cursing the fact of his having undertaken the journey—a journey not without considerable peril and annoyance, in consequence of the flooded state of the creek.

At last they reached the point designated by Mathews.

The landlord gave a cry of satisfaction.

"It is not so bad as I thought," he said. "I guess we can get over here without much danger, barring a wetting, and that we must expect."

Mathews, after surveying the stream for a moment, whipped up his horses and made for the ford.

Crack! crack!

The whip smote the air like the sharp reports of a rifle, and with a mad plunge the horses leaped into the stream.

They breasted it bravely.

The current was very strong, and for a moment they were borne downward.

But whip and voice were used unsparingly. They presently righted, and soon the clumsy vehicle was high and dry on the opposite bank.

The lower limbs of the two men were but slightly wet.

"That's good enough—quite good enough," said Mathews, exultingly. "Not very wet, after all, and no danger whatever of drowning."

"No; we got over safely enough."

"A glass or two of whisky will put us to rights," said Bill. "In less than half an hour we'll be in Colbeck, and I'll give you as good a drop as ever you put into your stomach."

Arriving at the village, Gyles excused himself.

"What!" cried Mathews, surprised. "Not going to old Jansen's? Never say no, man, to a drop of good liquor. You need it, too, to keep the cold from getting into your vitals."

But Garnett had other fish to fry.

His thoughts had been kept pretty busy on his way to the village.

His companion's meeting with Belcher must be prevented; and the less time the detective devoted to Mathews now, the better would it be for the success of his plans.

He promised, however, to call at Jansen's the moment he was through with his business.

"And business before pleasure, you know," he said, laughing gayly.

So saying he hurried along the straggling village street—the only street, indeed, the village had.

A hundred yards or so brought him to the Colbeck tailor's.

It was a small two-story frame house.

The front room was used as a shop—the rear a work-room, for the tailor and an assistant.

As it happened the assistant was absent.

Garnett without pause entered the inner room.

The tailor, a bald-headed little man of about fifty-five, arose to meet him.

"You are back sooner than I expected," he said, recognizing his visitor of the previous day.

"The storm, I presume, prevented you from reaching your destination. It was a terrible night! The worst we've had for many a long year."

The detective, without invitation, threw himself into a chair.

"How far is the nearest point from where one can forward a telegram?" he asked, not heeding the little tailor's talk.

"That's according to where you wish to send it."

"New York."

"Then you can send one from the village—that is if the storm has left the wires all right. The office is within a few doors of old Jansen's."

Jansen's was the place where Bill Mathews was awaiting him.

Had he to pass Jansen's to get his telegram off?

Of course he had.

But did the young man know which direction to take?

If not, the tailor would only be too pleased to show him—if he would but wait until his assistant came in.

Garnett discovered that his watch was stopped.

The tailor consulted his, and found the time to be a little after eleven.

"Good enough," thought Garnett, "not so late as I thought. I'll wait till this assistant comes, and get him to take the message."

He had good reason for not passing Jansen's just then.

There are no people on earth more curious than those of a small village; and the gossips of the inn, with Mathews at their head, he wished to avoid, on such an errand, as much as possible.

That the landlord of The Magpie would be on the lookout for him, Gyles took for granted. Presently the tailor's assistant came in.

The detective got out his tablets and wrote a few words.

They were of no apparent importance.

Any one might read them without suspecting their true purport.

"When did B. start? Wire immediately. G."

To this was appended the tailor's address.

The person addressed resided at a certain number on 23d street, New York.

With this brief message the assistant was dispatched to the telegraph-office.

Gyles settled himself down to await an answer, which, of course, would depend very much on the wires.

If they were working all right, it would come in less, perhaps, than an hour.

Within that time the answer arrived.

A small boy of twelve came in with the telegram.

"B. leaves at 1:30—for certain. Did not care about his going until we heard from you. He leaves train, R—Station, five miles from Colbeck. Says he has some friends there. Meet him at that point, if possible. P."

Thus ran the New York message.

It was from the Pinkerton Agency's branch office.

CHAPTER VII.

GYLES GARNETT'S STRANGE PRESENTIMENT.

The tailor watched Gyles Garnett curiously as he read the telegraphic dispatch.

But his curiosity was not to be gratified by any explanation; he might as well have studied the face of a sphinx as the detective's at that moment.

Garnett betrayed no sign whatever of the exultation he felt; and it is not too much to say that he was agreeably disappointed at the news conveyed in the message.

It would give him ample time to spend half an hour or so with his friend, Mr. Mathews, at old Jansen's.

And if Mathews was quite *compos mentis* when they parted, it would be no fault of his.

To the question—if there was a railway station in the immediate vicinity, the tailor replied that there was one within a mile of Colbeck.

Did it lead to R—?

Certainly; it was the next station.

Did trains run often?

Yes, every half hour.

Being directed how to find his way to the station, Garnett took his leave of the little tailor, thanking him for the courtesy he had shown.

The tailor replied that he would be delighted to see him again, and under no circumstances was he to pass his shop without calling.

This Garnett promised.

He made his way now to Jansen's.

It was a combination drinking-saloon and hotel; the only one of its kind in the village.

It did not take Garnett long to find that his good friend, Mathews, was decidedly hilarious.

Jansen's whisky was telling rapidly on him.

He was in the midst of a song, with a discordant chorus, when the detective drew up at the tavern door.

A gleam of satisfaction overspread Garnett's face as he listened.

Half a dozen voices joined in the refrain, and a very sorry affair it was.

"Brother Mathews is in a fair way to get drunk without any assistance of mine," commented the detective. "Still I shouldn't like to miss the chance of giving him a helping hand."

Without more ado Garnett passed into the tavern.

The landlord of The Magpie, and some six or seven boon companions, were seated around a ponderous circular table in the bar-room—Mathews very drunk, the others little better—and all making as much noise as possible.

As the detective entered the bar-room, the song ended abruptly.

In fact, Bill's brain was so muddled with liquor that he had forgotten the words.

After several abortive attempts to recollect the remaining verses, he launched out into a string of horrible oaths, and ended in throwing a glass at the head of a man who he imagined had interrupted him.

Luckily the glass, delivered with no true aim, missed its mark, and striking the opposite wall, shattered into a thousand fragments.

"Take (hic) that!" snorted Bill.

Those were the last words he uttered.

His next effort was to roll under the table, helplessly drunk.

Immediately thereafter a burly red-faced man rushed into the room to discover the cause of the uproar.

It proved to be old Jansen, the landlord.

With a quick glance he saw what had occurred, and laughing said:

"It's just what I expected. Bill oughter have taken more time between drinks. Lend a hand, some o' you fellers—best place for the cuss now's in bed. It'll take him a dozen hours, I reckon, to sleep this jag off."

The detective devoutly wished it would; and a dozen more to the back of them.

Not heeding Garnett's presence, old Jansen and three of the more sober of the party picked Bill up, and without ceremony bore him from the room.

Mathews being a very heavy man, they had some difficulty in carrying him up the creaking flight of stairs, which led to the upper apartments. But this they accomplished at last; and Garnett having seen all he desired, called for a cigar, and hastily left the tavern.

"And now the railway station," said he; "then for R—."

Following the direction of the tailor, he made for the outskirts of the village.

Having passed the last house of the straggling street, the detective plunged into a narrow lane to his left.

This lane, the tailor said, would lead him in a direct line to his destination.

The day was bright in sunshine, the foliage and vegetation of trees and plants of the deepest emerald; the sky an exquisite blue and divested of every particle of cloud, and the sweet singing of countless birds made the air vocal with melody.

It was one of those glorious days that brace a man up in spite of himself.

But there was one drawback.

The lane was sodden in parts—mud to the ankles in others.

Results of the previous night's storm as a matter to be expected.

Gyles Garnett was not the man to grumble at little discomforts.

He plodded on through the yellow clay-like mud and over sodden grass.

But he had some queer presentiment—as people often have—that he would not reach the station without an adventure, and a perilous one, too.

These presentiments, in his case, generally came true.

Garnett thought, too, for the first time since his departure from The Magpie, of the ghastly pale face and gleaming eyes, glued against one of the grimy panes of the bar-room window.

It was the face of the murdered Fales—or his Double!

Which?

He did not know what to think of those visits—warnings—call them what you will.

The note thrown into his room, he judged, could only have emanated from a human hand.

He was by no means superstitious; his practical training and solid sense being opposed to anything outside natural explanation.

It must be admitted that the detective had strange experiences within the last twelve or fourteen hours—some of which he would fain have solved, but this he was unable to do.

As he walked on toward the railway station, he began to grow sorely troubled and uneasy.

The feeling had come upon him suddenly.

He drew out his revolver and examined it carefully.

The cartridges were all right.

A glance convinced him that every chamber was in working order.

"I don't know what's come over me," said Garnett to himself. "This feeling is quite unusual. It would seem as if I were going into some great danger. Bah! I'm as nervous as an old woman."

By this time walking in the lane grew a little more pleasant.

The land was higher and the soil of a more stony nature.

Indeed, the detective had been going gradually up-hill.

Further, his approach had been watched from an elevation whence his every movement could be observed.

By whom?

CHAPTER VIII.

ATTACKED.

YES, Gyles Garnett was to meet a danger he little expected.

Behind a clump of dwarf scrubs, on the rising ground to which we have alluded, three most villainous-looking men awaited his approach.

The long, straggling street of the village was plainly visible from where they stood; and they had, no doubt, seen Gyles the moment he had turned into the lane, noting his every movement as he came along.

The fact of his being armed caused one of the men to explode with rage.

"Just our luck," he growled; "the cuss has a revolver."

"Well, what of that?" said the tallest of the three men. "Blow his revolver! Clubs is trumps every time. Swish! and down he goes afore he kin git his shooter out."

This gentleman at any time would have been a dangerous customer to encounter.

Aided by two others not much less ferocious and determined, he was doubly so.

Each of the men bore a murderous-looking bludgeon; and the ruffian who had spoken last spat on his hand to give an emphasis to his words.

They did not look quite like tramps—being too well-dressed—yet they appeared needy vagabonds, who would not hesitate to sacrifice life to replenish an empty purse, even to the extent of a few dollars.

"I don't like the bloke's looks," declared the first who had spoken. "He's an all-fired powerful man, too—a tough 'un, you bet; one as'll give us all our time to git the better of."

"He carries himself like a major; and look at that long stride of his. Whew! Them's the legs to go up a hill with."

"Better he'd stayed at home where he was," came the sententious reply of the tallest man.

"He's our mutton, an' don't you forgit it."

A sudden exclamation escaped one of the ruffians.

"What's up now?"

"Guess I've seen that chap afore."

"It looks as though I'd see'd him, too."

This from the third man.

"Where, Jack?"

"Hold on," said Jack. "Let me have a good look at his mug. Yes, by—!" suddenly with an oath—"if that ain't Gyles Garnett, I'm a fool. What do you say, Jim?"

"Don't know what to say. He looks like the cuss—an' he don't."

"His hair—"

"Garnett's was light."

"Face fair."

"Zactly."

"This chap's hair's black."
 "Complexion like a Gypsy's."
 "Right again."
 "Otherwise he's the detective bloke all over."
 "Shut up!" said the tallest man gruffly.
 "You fellows talk like donkeys. What's easier than ter dye hair, or bronze a face. I ain't been barn-storming for nothing. I'm an actor, I am—an' you can bet on it. Where's this feller Garnett come from?"
 "Chicago," both answered.
 "Pinkerton's?"
 "Yes."

"Then we'll kill the cuss! Detectives ain't no right to live, nohow," added the tall man, grimly. "Now, you fellers, shut your traps, an' listen. When he comes abreast of this clump of scrubs, be ready to spring on him, before he kin draw a bead on you. Understand?"
 Yes, they both comprehended that part of the business well.

Still the powerful-looking detective had a revolver, and that made some difference—to at least two of the number.

The foregoing occurred in one tithe of the time we take to tell it.

Garnett came on, unsuspecting the hidden assassins who lay in wait for him.

Troubled he was without a doubt. It seemed as if danger lurked in the clear bracing air; he felt it in his bones; but he was unconscious of its exact time and place.

He was not to remain long in ignorance.

The three ruffianly-looking men, well hidden behind the clump of scrubs, were ready at a word to leap into the road, and before the detective could draw his weapon, fell him to the earth—then crown their dastardly attack by murdering him.

"Durn him; men o' his stamp oughtn't ter live!" hissed the tall man, as he took a fiercer grip of his bludgeon.

At this instant a crow flew across the lane into an adjoining field.

Caw! Caw! Caw!
 There was something ominous in the hoarse notes which vibrated on the afternoon air.

Caw! Caw! Caw!
 The detective seemed roused from a reverie into which he had fallen.

His eyes followed the gyrations of the bird until it lit in the branches of a tall pine tree.

This fact perhaps saved his life.

The pine was some little distance from the hiding-place of his would-be murderers.

In following the flight of the crow, his glance fell on the clump of scrubs.

He thought he detected some moving object. Like a flash it dawned upon him that a human figure was endeavoring to conceal itself.

Then another and another came to view, as his eyes penetrated the density of the foliage.

There was no mistake! he was in danger!

"Forewarned, forearmed," he muttered.

The detective, however, did not betray the slightest uneasiness or alarm.

To have done so would have been playing into the hands of the hidden ones—who—he was sure were not there for any good purpose.

Perhaps a deeper game was being played than he imagined.

A few more paces would bring him abreast of the three men.

He took them—the steps—deliberately, keeping his eye meanwhile on the dwarf-scrubs, though without appearing so to do.

The men, wholly unaware that their presence was known, leaped into the road.

"Now, lads, at him!"

"Give the cursed detective his gruel!"

Thus rung the cries from his assailants.

But Garnett was prepared.

His revolver was out in the fraction of a second.

Its gleaming tube he leveled at the nearest of his assailants, in a deadly aim.

Few men care to face a firearm in the hands of a cool, desperate man.

So the rascals cowered, and, as it were, shrunk within themselves.

But for an instant only.

The next, the tallest and most forbidding of the three, shouted in a voice hoarse with passion:

"At him, durn ye! It's his life or ours, now!"

With a hoarse growl he sprung forward.

His attack was not unexpected.

Crack! went the detective's revolver.

It missed, and the ruffian was upon him.

Swish!

Down came the heavy bludgeon.

Garnett sprung to one side in time to save a crushed skull.

The force of his stroke sent the tall man sprawling on his face.

Well for him that it did, for a second bullet from the detective's revolver would otherwise have ended his career then and there.

As it was it passed through his hat, and took a lock of the ruffian's hair with it.

Nor were Jack and Jim idle.

Perceiving the diversion made by their leader, they flew at Garnett with furious oaths and curses.

Another shot.

Missed!

"Curse the luck!" growled Gyles. "Both arm and sight are paralyzed."

The smoke from the last discharge had barely cleared away, when swish!—bang!—and the detective's pistol was struck from his hand.

By this time the tall man had arisen.

Hoarse cries of triumph flew on the air.

Gyles was now, more than ever, at the mercy of those who sought his life!

CHAPTER IX.

A SOLID GHOST.

The odds were decidedly against the detective now.

His revolver—his only weapon—out of his grasp, what could he do?

His assailants were all powerful and active men.

Could he save himself by flight?

As a runner he was unsurpassed in the whole northwestern country.

He could easily have distanced the fleetest-footed of his enemies.

These thoughts passed through Garnett's mind with lightning-like rapidity.

The ruffians, Jack and Jim, struck at him savagely, forcing him back step by step.

Their taller comrade was searching for his club among the tall, rank grass and weeds at the lane side, where it had rebounded when he fell.

The fall had dazed and stunned him.

He had struck the hard, flinty roadway with considerable force.

At the moment he was certainly in no condition to be of much assistance to his fellows.

Garnett was aware of this.

He thanked his stars that it was so.

But even so—to what extent would it avail him, in his then helpless state?

"I'll not budge another foot," he said savagely to himself.

With a sudden bound he sprung on one of his assailants.

This move was so unexpected that he nearly succeeded in wrenching the club from the ruffian's hand.

"Help, Jim—help!" shouted the man, struggling desperately to free himself.

"Hold on to the stick, Jack! Hold on for your life!"

Jack, however, was in the hands of a more powerful man than he was.

The detective, alive to his danger, turned the fellow just in time to receive the stroke meant for himself.

Thud!

Down came Jim's bludgeon with a swishing sound.

Jack got the full benefit, released his grip of the club, and with a yell of pain, staggered back.

The force of Jim's stroke had dislocated his shoulder.

"Now we're on more equal terms!" exclaimed the detective, exultingly.

He sprung forward to settle Jim.

But here came an interruption.

An unearthly, most piercing cry, echoing and re-echoing through the placid air, made both men pause.

Jim's face blanched.

Even Jack's groans and curses ceased.

The terrible cry seemed to have come from a piece of timber some forty or fifty yards distant.

It was not repeated, and the two men advanced upon each other once more.

But again an interruption, and a more serious one—serious for one of the ruffians, as it proved.

The sharp, whip-like crack of a revolver, a shriek of fearful agony, and Jack, leaping at least a foot in the air, fell prone on his face—dead!

The shot had been fired from the small clump of timber—whence had emanated the blood-curdling cry.

Garnett saw the tiny column of blue smoke ascending on the skirts of the timber, and—a face—gracious heaven!—Joe Fales's!

Mystery upon mysteries!—what did it mean?

The detective, in his momentary excitement, forgot his fierce foe in front, and ere he could recover and meet the man's attack, he received a stunning blow that knocked him senseless. How long he had been insensible he could not tell.

He had a splitting headache, and a lump as large as a hen's egg on the side of his head.

Otherwise he was unhurt.

But where was the owner of that peculiar, ghastly face and gleaming eyes?

It was hard to believe that the spiritual embodiment of another world could fire a pistol—not only that, but fire it to kill!

Needless to say, the young detective believed in no wild speculation of the kind.

Yet the mystery of those sudden and unexpected appearances was none the less difficult to solve.

The agency of his preservation was human; he had no doubt of that.

But why should his savior—Fales, or his reputed brother—persevere in the glamour and weirdness of what appeared to border on the supernatural, instead of coming forward and proclaiming himself—as one friend to another.

"I don't half like this kind of work," thought Garnett. "It's puzzling, to say the least. Here have I concealed the corpse of him I thought to be Joe Fales—when up turns his perfect counterpart; and so ghostly, that I don't know what to think."

Another thing that surprised him was to see his revolver lying close at his feet.

"How did that come there?"

He stooped and picked it up.

Every chamber was loaded!

"My ghastly-faced friend is a very solid ghost," he communed; "not only a very solid ghost, but a very sensible one."

He bent a long searching glance toward the village.

Spiral columns of smoke were rising lazily in the air from the various chimney-tops—nothing more—not a living soul could be seen.

He turned his gaze where the railway station should be.

It stood a little distance off in the lower lands—embowered in a luxuriant setting of pines, larches and grand old elm trees.

But in whichever direction he looked it was the same—not a solitary human being met his eyes.

CHAPTER X.

THE 5:30 TRAIN.

THE hoarse cawing of a solitary crow, and the merry twittering of some birds, among the branches of an old elm, alone broke the silence of the narrow lane.

The detective could discern the railway station in the lower lands embowered in larches, elms and grand old oaks.

It was a charming spot to be sure, but apparently as deserted as was the rest of the landscape.

Garnett had no means of telling the exact time as his watch had stopped.

He looked at the sun.

It shone as brightly as ever.

Not a cloud marred the whole broad expanse of deep blue above him.

"It's after half-past two," said the detective, "if I am to judge by the sun."

He turned his attention to the dead body of Jack.

It lay face downward in the rank grass.

"Shot through the head," he said, reflectively.

Garnett approached the body, and turned it over on its back.

He had been mistaken in his surmise.

A small stream of blood was trickling slowly from the dead man's left side.

The tall blades of grass were dyed crimson, and a pool of blood had collected in one little spot.

For a moment a shudder passed through his frame.

"A bullet through the breast and as clean as a whistle," he muttered with a shiver.

Jack's face was ghastly white, but placid as a sleeping infant's.

He had died instantaneously.

"I should know those features," said Garnett, as he closely scanned the dead man. "I thought I recognized one of my assailants. This must be he."

In the excitement of the encounter he had not taken much notice of the ruffians who attacked him—having all he could do to defend himself from their furious onslaught.

Still he thought he had met one of them before; and now as to Jack he was positive.

But where?
His mind was still somewhat confused.
Again and again he regarded the slain man's ashen face.

In vain.
He failed to locate him—though the features were in a manner quite familiar.

"What if the scoundrels have to do with the Mathews gang," he reflected. "What if they have been sent to do me up. In that case—good-by to success."

The detective soon disabused his mind of these suspicions.

He bent over the body and dextrously went through Jack's pockets.

He found a dollar-bill, a twenty-five cent silver piece and some nickels—also a letter, crumpled and written in an ill-spelled, crabbed hand.

Garnett smoothed the crumpled note-paper, perusing it carefully.

It was addressed to "Jack Barnett," and bore the Chicago post-mark.

From its contents it was evident that Barnett had been very hard up.

He had been importuning a Chicago relative, in fact, for money, and had been sent a small sum to relieve his immediate wants.

"Ha!" the detective exclaimed, greatly relieved by his discovery. "I place you now, Jack Barnett, alias Jack Redmond, sent to Joliet Penitentiary five years for highway robbery—highway robbery with violence."

"Good enough! Nothing to do with the Mathews gang—nor have his comrades, either."

Garnett returned the money and letter to the dead man's pockets, saying:

"If the other rascals don't come back—and it is not likely they will—the letter will serve to identify him."

Without further waste of time he passed along the lane to the station.

It will be well to perhaps explain at this point that the detective the day before had arrived at Colbeck, after a cross-country walk of some twelve miles, and so was unaware of the exact locality of the small country depot to which the tailor had directed him.

A few minutes' brisk walking brought him to the station.

For a moment it struck him that the place was deserted.

He passed to the platform.

No one was to be seen—not a sound to be heard.

The station was as still as the grave.

"This is rather strange," he said aloud.

"There must be a ticket agent here; or is he asleep, perhaps dead?"

A horrible thought struck him at the moment.

The two ruffians who had attacked him—what had become of them?

They were men who would not scruple to commit murder if they reaped any benefit from it.

While thus cogitating, the detective heard a light footfall behind him.

He turned quickly.

A lank-looking man came forward.

He had fiery-red hair and a long beard of the same hue.

The face was good-natured, though expressionless.

The eyes of the lightest blue the detective had ever seen.

"Good-day sir," said the lank man, pleasantly.

Garnett returned the salutation, and said:

"I am glad some one's here. I thought the place deserted."

The new-comer proved to be the station-agent.

Did he know when the next train for R— would arrive?

3:15.

What time was it just then?

Oh, five minutes past three.

Garnett set his watch to that time.

He discovered in course of conversation with the agent that two men, answering the description of his assailants, had left by the previous train.

"And let me tell you, I'm not sorry for it," said the agent. "I was on pins and needles till the train came in. They were about the most ruffianly-looking fellows I ever saw."

Gyles smiled.

"You don't do much of a passenger traffic here?" he said carelessly.

"No. It is a miserably slow hole, I wish I was out of it."

"I'm sure I shouldn't like it," said the detective, leading on; "especially when one is apt to meet with tough characters—such as you just

described. Perhaps they were sneak-thieves, or highwaymen, or burglars."

"Shouldn't be surprised. They looked like it," said the lank man.

"First time you saw them?"

"Yes."

"Not likely they'll trouble you again."

"Don't know as much about that. Only hope they won't, that's all," said the station-agent.

The detective was positive now that neither of his assailants was connected with the Mathews gang.

Were they, the agent would in all probability have seen them before.

Further conversation elicited the fact that the two ruffians had taken their tickets for a little town some dozen miles further on than R—.

At 3:15 exactly, the train came puffing into the station.

Garnett boarded the cars, and next minute was whirled away to R—.

The train stopped at R— ten minutes for refreshments.

When the detective got off the cars, he saw an excited, swaying crowd on the platform.

A fierce struggle seemed to be going on.

Oaths, curses and blows rung out from the swaying mass.

Then the crowd parted.

An exultant cry, partly repressed, however, escaped Garnett.

And no wonder, for there were his assailants, struggling desperately in the hands of two Pinkerton detectives.

They were shackled—each to a wrist of one of his captors.

The taller had several ugly cuts on his face, from which the blood was pouring in streams.

He struggled and swore, and struck out furiously with his disengaged fist.

But he was in the grip of a more powerful man than himself, who used the butt of his revolver with terrible effect, forcing him step by step in the direction of the cars.

The ruffian, Jim, was in little better plight, and yelled at last, as he was being hauled along:

"Let up, curse you! Do you want to beat my brains out?"

"Come along gently, then," said his captor.

"I don't want to ill-use you, and if you cease your struggles, I won't. If you don't—why, it will be all the worse for you."

Garnett had no wish to interfere.

The Pinkerton men succeeded finally in getting their prisoners aboard the train.

Gyles kept on the skirts of the crowd.

One man volunteered the information that Jim and his companion were escaped convicts, who had been serving a long term, and who, with a third man, had broken jail.

Detectives were after the third man.

He would certainly be laid by the heels before the day was out.

Garnett smiled significantly as the man said this.

Jack Barnett was past all earthly tribunals and prisons.

By the time the train had left the station, the crowd had dispersed.

Garnett made inquiries now as to the arrival of the 1:30 train from New York.

He was told it would come in at 5:30—perhaps ten minutes or even a quarter of an hour later.

But 5:30 was the schedule time, and if he expected a friend it would be well to be on hand.

He left the station, and got into the main street of the town.

Recollecting that he had not eaten anything since morning, he entered a respectable looking restaurant.

He ordered a substantial meal and room.

Having fixed himself up, and disposed of his meal, he found he had three-quarters of an hour still on his hands.

He made a purchase of some cigars, and lighting one, took a stroll along the principal street.

By the time he got to the railway station, he was fully prepared to meet Bob Belcher.

But the surprise that awaited him was more than he anticipated.

CHAPTER XI.

TRAPPED.

THE train from New York did not arrive at R— till ten minutes after schedule time.

It was really marvelous that the line was in such good condition, after the storm of the night before.

But here came the surprise.

Six passengers alighted from the cars—four men and two women.

The detective scanned the men narrowly.

An exclamation of disappointment escaped from him.

Not one answered the description of his friend, Bob Belcher.

Five of the passengers who had alighted from the cars, hurriedly left the station.

The remaining one, carrying an old-fashioned grip-sack, loitered about the platform until the train had gone.

He seemed to have no particular purpose in view—and never once looked at the waiting detective.

He was a queer-looking customer, of medium height, long, grizzled beard, hair ditto, and bore the look of a Baxter street old clothes dealer.

Garnett had seen many of his kind before.

Might not Belcher come by the next train?

It was due at R—, 6:30.

So at least said one of the porters.

The detective was about to leave the railway station, when the seedy-looking man with the long hair and beard, accosted him:

"Ahem! Can you tell me, sir, where I can find a good hotel?"

"No; I'm a stranger here."

"Not even a restaurant, where I can get a square meal at a moderate price?"

The man's tones were jarring in the extreme to Garnett's ears.

"I before informed you that I was a stranger here," was his short testy reply.

There was something in the passenger's looks which he did not at all relish.

Being thus unfavorably impressed, he was about to walk off when the persistent interlocutor said again:

"You have not been here long then?"

Garnett regarded the fellow sternly but without answering him.

In nowise daunted, the man proceeded:

"Now I'll lay a wager you've not been here twenty-four hours. You neither know the hotel nor restaurant—that is proof positive that you are a stranger. But, as I'm not a hard man to please, perhaps you can tell me the location of a good gin-mill. I have come here to buy— Eh, Mister Harry Bluff?"

"Who the deuce are you?" broke from the astonished detective.

"Haw! haw haw!" came hoarsely from the long-bearded man's lips. "Don't you know me, eh? Thought you wouldn't. Come, tip us your flipper, old boy!"

Garnett could hardly believe his ears.

"I know you now!" he cried. "You speak in your natural tones. Welcome, Bob—a thousand times welcome!"

As the detective uttered the words, Belcher—for he it was—snatched away his beard and hair, extended his hand, and grasping the pseudo Harry Bluff's warmly, said:

"I'm glad to see you! But we'll attract attention here. Let us go."

He thrust wig and beard into his pockets.

Belcher, divested of a portion of his disguise, appeared to be a man of between two and three and thirty.

He was at first sight what might be called a pleasant, good-looking fellow.

A second look was less favorable, however.

The "crook" was plainly defined in his shifty snake-like eye, heavy jowls and somewhat coarse sensual lips.

"Well," said Belcher, as they left the railway station, "you have seen Mathews, of course?"

"Yes."

"He's a true-blue," said Bob enthusiastically.

"A right jolly fellow when you come to know him."

"Why, yes; I must say I like him. But come along," added Garnett. "You must need refreshment after your long journey. I've engaged a room, and you can tell me all about yourself since I last saw you—and the cause of such a remarkable get-up."

As they emerged into the main street, the detective was speculating as to what the grip-sack contained.

"A change of clothing, no doubt," he muttered to himself.

They passed into the restaurant, and after Belcher had disposed of a hearty meal, they went up to Garnett's room.

Wine was ordered.

Bob preferring stronger drink, was served with whisky.

"Now, what is the meaning of your disguise?" asked Garnett. "You're surely not masquerading for fun?"

"No, indeed!" was the laughing reply. "But let me tell you how it happened."

Belcher, after gulping down a second glass of the liquor, went on:

"You see, I found out that a couple of fellows who professed to belong to the crowd were Pinkerton men."

"In fact, they had been sent to shadow me."

"Well, they played their game so nicely that I didn't suspect them for some time."

"At last I dropped to them from a few little remarks they let fall."

"Good enough, my lads," said I. "You're mighty smart, but you don't get much out of me for all your cunning."

"It's my turn to watch you now," said I, "seeing as how you're sailing under false colors. Shouldn't wonder if you aren't the cusses as are after Bill Mathews's gang."

"All this you said to yourself," interrupted the pseudo Harry Bluff, carelessly.

"Precisely. Do you think I was fool enough to blab my plans before them? Not much!"

"Well, I goes to work and explains my suspicions to Jenny, my wife—for there's nothing like a woman's wit, Harry, to get a fellow out of a hole."

"You're right. Well?"

"What do you think she does?"

"Shadows them!"

"Exactly. But she does more. She tells 'em a cock-and-bull story that would deceive a saint. Haw! haw! haw! It's awfully funny. I'm sure they'll not get over it in a month of Sundays—and they'll curse Jenny as long as they live."

Belcher paused provokingly.

Garnett expressed his anxiety to know what Jenny had told the detectives.

But Bob at that point was annoyingly non-communicative.

"You see," he went on, "that's her secret, not mine. However, she followed my gentlemen to Twenty-third street—Pinkerton's Branch Agency; and then, of course, the jig was up."

"They knew I was to leave by the 1:30 train for R—"

"And that you certainly did."

"Of course. But Jenny's nice little story fooled them to the top of their bent. Besides I got up such a disguise that the cusses didn't know me from Adam. An old dog for a hard road, Harry—every time. Ha!—ha!—ha!"

Bob Belcher's hilarity was not altogether relished by the detective.

Besides, the "crook" laid such stress on certain points in his account, that Garnett grew suspicious that things were not quite as right as they should be.

What indeed if he himself was suspected by the jocular Robert.

"I had better keep a sharp lookout," he reflected. "The shrewdest man may have the wool pulled over his eyes. I don't propose that this rascal shall come the old soldier over me."

"You were all-fired smart to get the better of the detectives," said Garnett, admiringly.

"You mean my wife?" corrected Belcher, as he gulped down his third drink of whisky. "Ah, that woman is a wonder, and you'd say so if you only knew her. You wouldn't believe it now," he went on, loquaciously, "that she met you once upon a time."

"The devil!" exclaimed the detective, involuntarily.

"No, not the devil—Mr. Harry Bluff himself."

And the lips of Bob Belcher were wreathed in an almost sardonic grin.

"What's coming now?" thought Garnett. "I'll wager this fellow thinks he has me in his power. There's no mistaking his sneering tone. He knows or guesses who I am; that is evident. His wife met me, eh? I don't believe a word of it. However, forewarned, forearmed," the detective said to himself.

Garnett's face, as he thus reflected, was certainly no index to his thoughts.

A broad smile lit his features as he put the question.

"Where did your good wife see me, Bob?"

Belcher rose tipsily to his feet.

It might have been to ignite his cigar at one of the jets of gas which illuminated the room.

There was a hideous grin on his face as he said:

"My dear friend, must I tell you?"

"Certainly."

Garnett lost none of his composure for an instant.

"Well, then, I will tell you."

Each word as it left Belcher's lips was strongly emphasized.

"She—met—you—in—"

He paused as heavy steps rung out in the passageway outside the room.

Bob straightened up and turned his eyes in the direction of the door.

Simultaneously Garnett sprang to his feet. He felt that some great crisis had arrived.

The door opened ere either could speak, and two powerfully-built men stood on the threshold.

For a moment they eyed the detective, then sprang into the room.

"Now, Gyles Garnett, alias Mister Harry Bluff, make a single movement and you are a dead man!"

"Trapped!" exclaimed the detective, with an oath.

"Ay, trapped—as you'd have trapped others," hissed Belcher, exultantly.

"What's medicine for the goose is medicine for the gander," laughed one of the men.

And three revolvers were aimed at Garnett's head.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TABLES TURNED.

GYLES GARNETT was now in a bad fix. He was far from expecting such a surprise.

Belcher had led him into a trap. In fact, he and his comrades in New York were at fault—out-manuevered by Belcher's superior cunning.

It was just possible, too, that the proprietor of the restaurant was in the plot, or wherefore the sudden appearance of the "crook's" accomplices?

The men looked very determined as they stood confronting Garnett with their weapons; he knew the least hostile movement on his part would be the signal for them to fire.

What was to be done? Accept the inevitable with as good a grace as possible?

It was the only course to pursue under the circumstances.

"Well, old man; you see we have the bulge on you," said one of the new-comers, grimly.

"Yes," replied the detective, "there's no gainsaying that. What are you going to do?"

His coolness staggered them somewhat.

There was no change of color—not even the movement of a muscle.

Belcher, after regarding him for a moment, said:

"You have played a losing game, Mr. Garnett. But it doesn't seem to effect you much. Therein I commend your good sense; and now, pals—without removing his eyes from the detective—"we'll trouble him for his shooter. It's rather too dangerous a weapon to have very long in his hands—seeing as it might go off, and hurt somebody."

The men nodded and grinned.

Bob with much mock politeness now approached him.

"May I beg you to raise your hands above your head?" he said sweetly.

Garnett complied—what else could he do?

"Thank you."

Thus sententiously spoke Mr. Belcher, as he proceeded in a rapid search of the detective's pockets.

"And now, I beg you attend to me," continued the ruffian, quietly—"permit me to correct myself—I mean to the inventory. One six-chambered revolver of excellent pattern—ahem!—; a wallet containing letters and well-stocked with bills—the genuine article, and no counterfeit—which makes the prize doubly welcome. And—what is this? A telegram from New York, Twenty-third street, relative to the movements of your humble servant. Well, I declare—with simulated surprise—"who'd have thought they took such an interest in me! That's all. I think we have rendered Mr. Gyles Garnett harmless as a dove for the present."

Bob Belcher, with all his cunning, had somewhat overreached himself.

The detective was not so defenseless as Mr. Belcher imagined.

There was a secret pocket which escaped his search, which by a peculiar contrivance effectually concealed a second weapon—a revolver of smaller caliber, but one which Garnett always relied on in just such emergencies.

Therefore he could scarcely forbear a smile at the thought of his utter helplessness as expressed by Belcher.

He would wait patiently, however, for his chance, taking no risks as to its success.

Three to one were long odds at best.

What would be the next move?

The two ruffians had lowered their weapons, but kept an eye on the detective, nevertheless.

"I think now we had better bind our good friend," said Bob, unctuously, "for, if all ac-

counts be true, he's about as slippery a chap as ever lived."

"You are surely not afraid of one man," said Garnett, calmly. "You are surely not afraid of an unarmed man, are you?" he repeated, with a touch of scorn in his voice.

"Not exactly afraid."

"Then what do you want to bind me for?"

"Oh, just for fun, that's all."

"Queer fun," said Garnett, nonchalantly.

"So say we all."

At this the three men laughed in unison, as though Belcher had perpetrated a good joke.

"There's an old saying," continued the ruffian, "that's 'safe bind, safe find.' So you see there'll be some method in our madness. Wouldn't like to disturb your equanimity, friend Bluff—not for worlds, my dear sir. Would we, pals?"

"Certainly not."

"But we have hard and fast lines."

"That's so."

"And we must act up to them."

"Of course."

"Then that settles it," said Bob.

Belcher picked up his grip-sack and opened it.

"Keep your peepers on him, boys."

"Never fear. You drive ahead," said they.

Belcher took from his grip-sack several yards of stout rope.

"You see I did not come empty-handed," he laughed.

"No, I perceive not," said Garnett coolly.

"And pray what are you going to do after binding me?"

"Give you a nice country ride in a light wagon," was Belcher's reply. "But hold on—I forgot one thing."

"What is that?"

"The gag."

"So you mean to gag me, eh?"

"Under the circumstances I think it would be as well. What say you, boys?"

"Gag the cuss by all means. We don't want any trouble on the road to Bills," said the men, grinning.

During the foregoing Garnett was watching his captors with the eye of a lynx.

He had already meditated some grand move. It would never do to allow Belcher to bind and gag him.

So they meant taking him to Bill Mathews's old tavern!

Once there he was lost!

A singular interruption came about at this point of the game.

Belcher had made a mock test of the rope, and laughed.

"I think this would hang you as well as bind you," he remarked, jocosely.

The words had barely left his lips, when three distinct taps on one of the window-panes of the room fell with startling effect on the ears of the four men.

All eyes were directed simultaneously to the far window.

It was by this time quite dark outside.

The gas-jets in the room flickered as if exposed to a keen draught.

The cause was instantly apparent—one of the panes of the window was missing.

"What was that?" Belcher asked nervously.

"Some one at the window," said one of the men, keeping an eye on the detective's movements.

"It must be some one belonging to the house, then," said Bob. "Perhaps the old man playing a practical joke. I wish he'd keep his jokes to himself."

"He's too fresh," growled one of the men.

"Always up to some deviltry or another, confound him! I'll give him a piece of my mind when I get down-stairs, and—"

But here a second interruption came, evidently from the passage.

A hoarse chuckle wafted faintly into the room.

Then followed a peal of most unearthly laughter—as if the door had been partly opened.

This was more than the ruffians could stand.

They trembled and grew white with fear.

And while their gaze was riveted on the door, their prisoner seemed quite forgotten.

Now came Garnett's time to act.

He had seen more than the three men, and knew well the cause of the tapping at the window and the more unnatural sounds from the door.

Being nearer the window than his captors he had caught a momentary glimpse of a well-known face—the face of Joe Fales's Double.

The laughter he knew had been produced by ventriloquial means, aided by the missing pane of glass.

Belcher and his companions, scared by what they had heard, were completely off their guard. The sash of the window was raised almost without a sound.

Garnett whipped out his weapon from its secret pocket, and before his late captors could realize the gravity of their position, he had them covered.

At the same moment a lithe, muscular figure sprung through the open window into the room. When Belcher and his accomplices turned, it was to find a brace of revolvers pointed at their hearts.

A cry of rage and despair broke from them. When too late they realized the trick they had been played.

"This is what we call turning the tables," laughed the new-comer. "Now, gentlemen, let me trouble you to throw down your arms. Stand on no ceremony, I beg. You, Mr. Belcher, will please look alive, as my weapon is of hair-trigger make, and apt to go off."

"Who the deuce are you, anyhow?" growled Bob.

"Business before pleasure, my dear sir. Down with that weapon of yours."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MEXICAN WOOD-CHOPPER.

THERE was no mistaking the sternness of the new-comer's order.

Belcher, like a rat driven into a corner, looked undecided for a moment; then, sullenly relaxing hold of his weapon, it fell at his feet.

Those of his companions followed almost simultaneously. Their hands shook, while big beads of perspiration rolled down their white faces.

"Mr. Garnett," said the stranger, quietly, "oblige me by picking up those weapons."

Garnett complied.

The ruffians were still menaced by the new-comer's loaded weapon—which had all the effect necessary upon them.

"That's what I call tit for tat," said the stranger, smilingly. "I was a close observer of Mr. Belcher's little by-play;—and—*what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander*. I believe those were the words our friend with the brocky face used. And now I think it would be as well to search them, Mr. Garnett—if only to recover your own from our revered friend, Mr. Belcher."

The search was gone through with dispatch.

The detective, besides recovering his property, got some three hundred dollars in bogus bills, and not much less in genuine bank-notes. But this was not all—three ugly dirks, with edges as keen as razors, came to light, as well as two murderous slung-shots.

"I declare, they were quite walking arsenals," laughed the man who had so coolly given his orders.

The ruffians glared at him furiously, but dared not move. Garnett had gone through his work with much method, not as yet uttering a word; but it was evident that he enjoyed the discomfiture of Belcher and pals with a keen relish.

All this being accomplished, the grip-sack was overhauled.

It contained two other coils of stout rope; a bunch of skeleton keys and a complete disguise—whiskers, mustache, etc.

Belcher had come well provided, but he little suspected that his cunningly-laid schemes would militate against himself.

The grip-sack was brought into use.

The notes—both bogus and genuine—were first thrust in—the dirks, skeleton keys and disguise followed—then it was shut with a sharp, click-like snap.

For the first time Gyles Garnett spoke.

"What's to be done with the coils of rope?" he asked.

"Give the rascals a taste of their own medicine," was the reply. "Bind them hand and foot. Hold on though—I am an expert at that business," as a sudden thought seemed to have struck him.

Garnett for a moment looked at the man earnestly.

The flickering gas-jets fell on his face, lighting its strange expression as he had never seen it before.

The resemblance between the murdered detective and his Double was singularly striking.

But one point of dissimilarity Gyles observed—the difference of color and expression of the eyes.

His mysterious friend's eyes were of a dark brown—the slain Pinkerton Agent's a steel gray.

In all other respects they were alike—height, build, color of hair—even features.

Garnett took the position previously occupied by his strange friend—covering the three ruffians as formerly.

Scowls and remonstrances were thrown away on the man who now dealt with them.

Dexterously the stranger went to work, and with great expedition bound and gagged them.

"That's perfectly satisfactory," he said. "Still I propose to put them out of harm's way for a short time."

"Where?"

"I must think. The proprietor of the restaurant is evidently in collusion with them—and we must find some spare room, or closet large enough to stow them in, until we can hit upon a plan for their removal. We must get them away to-night, if possible."

"And where to?"

"Oh, I have all that cut and dry. I know of a place about a mile outside of R—, an old woodchopper's hut. The man is a Mexican whose life I saved, and, in my interest, he is as true as steel."

Having seen that Belcher and his companions were bound and gagged securely, Joe Fales's counterfeit presentment made a hurried search of the room.

The apartment contained one press closet, but neither large nor airy enough in which to confine their prisoners. So Garnett's strange friend pursued his investigations in the passage.

On his return he said:

"I think we can fix them for a little while at least. I have found a queer hole—a sort of lumber-room, for there are carpets, bedding, etc., stowed away there. It's about as safe a place as we can put them in. There is no danger of them giving us the slip, or attracting attention for the short time they'll be there. Besides, there is little fear that they'll suffocate. Come! We'll carry them out."

Garnett went to the door, and looked into the passage.

It seemed as though the stillness of death reigned throughout the building; not the faintest sound was to be heard.

Without further delay Belcher was carried from the room.

His eyes glared vindictively.

But beyond that he could make no sound or movement.

"You don't relish my work, friend Bob," said the stranger, with a quiet chuckle. "But it had to be done, my dear fellow. 'Safe bind, safe find,' you know."

The work of conveying the prisoners to the lumber-room did not take more than a few moments; then, after securing the door, they re-entered Garnett's apartment to discuss their future action.

Every moment now was valuable.

Though it looked at first that the landlord or some one in the house was in collusion with Belcher and his pals, they were not so sure that this was the fact. Still it behooved them to act with due caution and secure their captives beyond a possibility of rescue.

There was little time for explanations as to who the stranger really was, so this part of the programme was dispensed with until a more favorable moment.

"What time are you?" asked Garnett's strange friend.

The detective consulted his watch, and found it to be a little after eight o'clock.

"So late! Then I must be off."

"Where?"

"To see about a conveyance for those fellows in the lumber-room. I may find some difficulty in getting the right kind. But time just now is everything."

"You know R— pretty well, I should judge," said Garnett, with some curiosity.

"Thoroughly," and a peculiar smile flitted over the man's face. "I'll be gone about an hour, and by that time everything will be arranged. Make yourself as comfortable as possible until my return."

"Will you leave by the window?"

The unknown broke into a quiet chuckle.

"Not at all," he replied. "I'll pass on through the restaurant—as a cash customer. Have no fear. I'll take care you're not interrupted," and so saying, the stranger left the room without further remark.

The detective, when he was gone, lit a cigar and puffed thoughtfully.

There was a mystery about this strange man which effectually puzzled Garnett—not that he for an instant doubted the genuineness of his friendship.

But who was he? What object had he in aid-

ing him, and by what miracle did he appear so promptly when absolutely needed?

The detective's reflections did not carry him nearer a solution than before—and he smoked on and on, thinking of other things.

Nine o'clock—then a quarter past—but no stranger.

Each minute Garnett grew more uneasy, and restless.

What was keeping him?

He had promised to be back in an hour.

It was now half-past nine.

Was it possible he had fallen into the hands of enemies? or perhaps he had found greater difficulty than he had expected in obtaining the conveyance.

"That must be it," said Garnett half aloud.

A strange sound at one of the windows!

He turned his head quickly.

The sash was forced up, and in sprung the unknown followed by another man—a powerfully-built fellow, of exceedingly swarthy complexion.

"This must be the Mexican," thought the detective.

And he was right.

CHAPTER XIV.

SHADOWED.

"I was a little over my time," said Garnett's unknown friend. "And this is the Mexican of whom I spoke."

The wood-chopper—a resolute looking man of about forty years or so—shook Garnett's hand warmly, saying in excellent English!

"Our entrance by the window possibly surprised you. But that is the fault of our friend down-stairs—the proprietor, I mean. The man is a rascal—an ex-convict—and a crook whenever opportunity offers. I happen to know his history well; but the least said of it just now the better."

"Having ascertained that there are about half a dozen of the most desperate New York crooks in the house," explained the unknown, "I thought it prudent to have the carriage come round by the rear. These windows look out upon an alleyway, and—"

"We must take our prisoners out that way," Gyles interrupted.

"Exactly."

"How are you going to do it without attracting attention?"

"Quite easily. The height from the windows to the alley is about fourteen feet. We have enough good stout rope for that purpose; and the moment they are lowered there are two strong men below to attend to the rest. So you see we are prepared for every emergency."

"But what if an interruption comes from down-stairs?"

"That is also attended to. We have a couple of trusty fellows, who will keep the rascally landlord and his satellites busy, until we are some distance on our way. In fact all we have to do is to lower our prisoners into the alley."

"Then the sooner we set about it the better."

"Certainly."

Garnett's unknown friend made a motion to the Mexican to follow him.

"You remain here," said he, to the detective. A few moments later Bob Belcher, with a rope affixed under his arms, was lowered through the open window.

At a signal from the unknown the men in the alley removed the rope from under his armpits, and bore him to the back.

The other two were lowered in turn, and as safety ensconced as their pal.

The work did not take more than two or three minutes, after which the sash was sent into its place.

"And now," said the stranger, "myself and friend will make ourselves scarce by the same mode of egress—only that we have a ladder to go down by. At the same time I'll take Mr. Belcher's grip-sack with me."

"And I?"

"You of course will pass out through the restaurant. The two men there will follow immediately. They have a hack waiting a little way up the street. That hack will take you to our friend the Mexican's."

"I understand you."

A few more words and the unknown and his swarthy companion descended into the alley.

Garnett heard them removing the ladder from the window.

Presently the roll of carriage-wheels, and clatter of horses' feet, told him that the hack had started on its journey.

Then lowering the sash of the window, he turned off the gas and went down-stairs.

In the restaurant he saw about a dozen people—men and women.

Two of the former in particular he observed had engaged the landlord in earnest conversation.

These two glanced sharply at the detective, and, igniting their cigars, followed him into the street—not unobserved, however, by the rather villainous-looking proprietor.

Once outside, Garnett paused as if undecided which way to take, but, in reality, to give the men a chance to speak.

They brushed past him, one saying in a low tone:

"The cab is a little further up, at the corner. Do not appear to be in a hurry, but keep us in sight. *We are watched!*"

The last words were spoken significantly, placing it beyond question that the proprietor of the restaurant had his suspicions, even of the men with whom he had been so familiarly conversing.

Such, as it happened, was the fact; for, immediately the two men had left the restaurant, he stole quickly and noiselessly after them.

His lynx-eye caught enough to verify his suspicions, as with a smothered oath, he slid back from the doorway.

"Jerry!"

A small, sharp-visaged lad of about fourteen appeared.

The landlord whispered a few instructions to him, and Jerry darted into the street.

He crossed over into the shadow of the opposite houses, and, unobserved, saw Garnett and the two men get into a cab that stood at the corner.

An instant later the vehicle rolled down a narrow street to the left, the boy following in quick pursuit.

Soon he caught up with the flying hack, swung himself on behind, and was whirled away with the other occupants, without having aroused the faintest suspicion that there was a passenger more than desired.

After a journey of about a mile, the hack stopped within a dozen yards or so of a log cabin by the roadside.

Though the night was pitch dark, the lad knew the spot well.

Noiselessly he left his perch, sprung in among a clump of bushes, and awaited developments.

The door of the rude, wooden structure was wide open; and a bright light, shooting out into the darkness, discovered the presence of a second carriage.

The boy could scarcely refrain giving vent to a startled cry as he beheld two men carrying the body of a third into the hut.

This was followed by another and still another.

He caught sight of the faces of the bearers, and uttered two words:

"The Mexican!"

Meanwhile the drivers held a whispered conversation with their fares, and mounting their boxes drove back to the town.

Jerry, having followed the instructions given him by the proprietor of the restaurant, started after the last hack, caught up as before, swung himself on behind, and got off at the point at which he had set out.

A little later he was in the restaurant, giving the landlord an account of his journey.

"Just as I suspected," said the latter, grimly. "Belcher has overreached himself. He's cunning, but not cunning enough. Now, Jerry—just you listen to me," he went on, addressing the lad. "If you let one word of this pass your lips, I'll flay you alive! You understand? Now go—and hold your gab."

The landlord was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind when he had reflected on what he had heard.

"Something must be done, and quickly," he said to himself. "I wasn't wrong in my surmises of the two men; but that Mexican has given me a hard nut to crack. Who'd have suspected he was in the business? Upon my soul the job was very neatly done. And now as there's no help for it—I must take a hand in—if only to save myself. The first thing is to warn the people at The Magpie—then attend to Mr. Mexican and his little set at the cabin. It's darned lucky I set Jerry nosing after them. That boy is a hummer, and no mistake."

Soon after the proprietor of the restaurant was closeted with half a dozen of as tough-looking scoundrels as ever met under one roof.

And here we leave them for the present to follow the fortunes of Garnett and his companions.

CHAPTER XV.

NAT TRUMBLE.

GARNETT had not the faintest idea of the identity of the two men whom he had followed into the cab. It was only after they had entered the Mexican's hut that he recognized them—and not even then until they had removed certain articles of disguise from their persons.

He did not seem, however, to be at all surprised at the transformation.

One of the men was he who had answered his telegram, from the branch office, New York.

"Why did you not take the same train as Belcher?" he asked of this man.

"Simply because the rascal gave us the slip; and, concluding he had gone to R—, we took the next train so as to catch up."

"And came within an ace of missing him."

"Well, there's nothing to grumble about," said the second man. "Matters might have been worse."

"Yes, much worse, but for our friend there," said Garnett, dryly—pointing to the unknown—to whom he owed life and liberty, on at least two occasions.

A meaning look passed between the three men which proved to Garnett that they had some sort of previous knowledge of each other—still he ventured upon no remark with regard to it.

"It would seem that the landlord suspected you notwithstanding your disguise," he observed with apparent carelessness.

"At the outset, no—subsequently, yes," replied the first man. "Something—I don't know what—made him suspicious."

"You had met before?"

"Yes."

"Might I ask where?"

"Sing Sing, where he was serving a term for burglary. We did not imagine, however, that he was located in R—."

"No?"

"In fact it was somewhat of a surprise to us. But I guess we fooled him neatly."

"I don't think so," said the detective with a marked smile.

"You don't think so—and why?"

"From the fact of your arousing his suspicions. Ten to one but we have been followed."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the two Pinkerton agents in a breath.

"I strongly suspect such is the case, however. Did you remark while talking to him, a very keen lad—of say some fourteen or fifteen years—who, if I mistake not, was paying particular attention to you?"

"Yes, we certainly did," was the reply.

"The landlord suspecting you, what's more natural than that he should have sent the lad after you," said Garnett.

"That is so," put in the Mexican. "I think now we made a mistake in sending the hackmen away."

"Are they not to be trusted?"

"They are perfectly trustworthy—true as steel for that matter—but it would have been as well perhaps to have had them remain."

"I understand you. In case of an attack?"

"Partly. But more important still—to remove the prisoners, if necessary, to securer quarters."

They were perfectly aware of the desperate measures such a man as the proprietor of the restaurant would take, to release Belcher and his fellows from the clutches of the law.

Beside, from what Garnett now heard, it was evidently to the landlord's interest to take prompt action in the matter.

It was ascertained beyond doubt that his place was infested by a crowd of New York crooks of the most desperate character—men who could be easily prevailed on to attack the hut—when it was presumably supposed that its defenders were unprepared to offer a successful resistance.

As the hour grew later the greater was the uneasiness experienced.

The Mexican's hut consisted of three rooms—in the inner of which lay the bound and gagged prisoners.

They of course heard and knew nothing of what was occurring. Even if they had they were beyond availing themselves of any knowledge thus obtained.

As to assisting in their own escape they were perfectly helpless.

A pause of some moments, then one of the Pinkerton agents said:

"Well, something must be done. We cannot allow ourselves to be caught like rats in a trap."

"Nor involve our friend, the Mexican," said Garnett.

"Don't mind me, gentlemen," said that individual, promptly. "I am well able to take care of myself."

The question is—how are you armed?"

There was nothing to complain of on that head.

There were six revolvers in the party, besides two serviceable rifles owned by their host.

There was also ample ammunition in case of an attack, which they now had no doubt would take place some time during the night—or more likely still, in the early morning.

Garnett concluded that his time had now arrived to find something out about the unknown.

The mystery of Joe Fales's Double was distressing and perplexing him.

The detective made a sign to the unknown, and he followed him out of the hut.

The night was still pitch dark, neither moon nor star being visible, nor a breath of air stirring.

The two men walked down the road for some distance without speaking.

They paused when about two hundred paces from the hut.

"Well," said the unknown, breaking in on the

deathlike stillness that surrounded them. "I see you have something to communicate."

"Yes. I thought this the best chance to become better acquainted. I'll be very brief, as time is precious to both—especially under the circumstances."

"I understand. Proceed."

Garnett, with praiseworthy brevity, recounted what is already known to the reader—his doubts and perplexities as to the identity of the unknown—his striking resemblance to Joe Fales—the discovery of the latter's mutilated body on the old wooden bridge—and the effect of his sudden and ubiquitous appearances, when the detective's life was in danger—all of which had and did still greatly mystify him.

The stranger listened patiently until Garnett was done.

So far as he was concerned, it seemed to be an old story, and one which there would be little difficulty on his part in explaining.

"Now listen," he said. "I know of the murder of Fales, but could not prevent it. That I have so marked a resemblance to the unfortunate man is strange, from the fact that I bear no relationship whatever to him. That he had a brother in the same business was also unknown to me, until I heard it from the lips of the counterfeiters. I do not hail from Cincinnati or Chicago, but from New York. I am not identified in any way with the Pinkertons, but work for a private New York agency. I knew all about that ramshackle structure of Mathews's, when a mere lad. In fact, I was born within half a mile of Colbeck, and reared on a farm until I was about fourteen years of age, when I ran away to New York City, to better myself. Since then I have been everything in turn, from a news-boy, grocery clerk, to a full-fledged private detective. Knowing this part of the country so well, I was engaged by my firm to come out here and obtain evidence, if possible, to convict this band of murderers and counterfeiters. I may also tell you I have been greatly aided by Bill Mathews's pretty daughter. That is all there is to it. If I have aided you in any way, I am much gratified."

Garnett had listened so far in breathless amazement.

"Aided me!" he repeated. "Why, you have saved my life on two occasions, at least."

"Don't mention it," the other interrupted, warmly. "You would have done the same, were you positioned as I was. And now I think we understand each other."

"But the secret passages in Mathews's old tavern?" persisted Gyles.

"They are all right. I am not going to let you know everything—unless, indeed, we become partners in the work of rooting out this terrible band of counterfeiters. But I may tell you right here that I cannot take your other two friends into my confidence. Utilize them, by all means, if necessary, but after to-night, the best place for them is New York."

"Then you mean me to take a hand in?"

"Certainly—if agreeable to you. We'll share the dangers and any profits that may result from our joint action. Does my offer suit you?"

"It does. One more question."

"Well?"

"What is your name?"

"Confidence begets confidence," was the laughing answer. "Knowing yours, I must give you mine—Nat Trumble. Plain Nat will do in our dealings with each other."

"I admire your frankness."

"And I yours. Now, what plan of action do you propose?"

"I think we can make up our minds for an attack."

"Not a doubt of it. And the rascals will come in force, you can depend. It is to the landlord's interest to liberate those men—and he will leave not a stone unturned to effect his object. We'll have to defend the hut, that's certain."

"I am sorry for the Mexican."

"Oh, never mind the Mexican," said Nat. "He didn't mean to stay. So whatever be the result it will not injure him. Ha!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Listen! Do you not hear?"

"No, I confess I hear nothing."

"I'm not mistaken, however. They are coming!"

So far, indeed, Garnett had heard nothing, but with his companion the case was different.

Nat Trumble had a phenomenally quick ear, for presently came very faint sounds borne on the quiet night air.

"There!" said Nat, in a lowered tone. "You must have heard that surely."

"I do hear something now," replied Garnett. "But it's not necessarily those we expect. They would have waited till later—when they could make an attack a certainty."

"You don't know such cattle, I perceive," said Nat, dryly. "Here they come, expecting to find us unprepared. They will find their mistake. Follow me with as little noise as possible."

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW MOVE BY THE ENEMY.

We have passingly alluded in a previous chapter to a scene between the proprietor of the restaurant and some six or seven of his rascally acquaintances.

The room in which they had assembled was used only by men of the "crook" class—where they could meet and evolve their plans in security, and without fear of interruption from the law.

It was a common occurrence for thieves to come on from New York, and plan there the most daring robberies, and not a soul—but those who were engaged—the wiser of what was going on.

The landlord had an easy task in addressing such an audience, as the reader may well believe.

He briefly described to them all that had occurred, bearing on the capture of Belcher and his companions—how he had them followed, and where they were then prisoners—ending in the necessity of a prompt rescue.

The thieves listened patiently, and met his proposition with the utmost fervor.

"How far is this Mexican's hut from R—?" asked a powerfully-built man, answering to the name of Big Jake.

"A little more than a mile."

"And you say he poses as a wood-chopper?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to go a fiver that he is one of those infernal Pinkerton agents," said Big Jake.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," said the landlord, whose name was Tom Arkright. "The cusses are everywhere. It is devilish hard to keep track of them. In my opinion such cattle should be squelched."

"Squelched they should indeed be!" responded a chorus of voices.

"That's the talk," said Arkright. "Can I depend on you all to take a hand in—*in squelching them?*"

"You can, and the sooner you set about it the better," was the prompt response.

"That will come in good time, too. Listen to what I am about to tell you. We have to deal with determined devils—all of them are well-armed. Much depends on patience—and patience will lead us to success."

"Ay, ay; we know all that. Go on," said they.

"Well, then—first we must take them unawares. In fact we must wait until they are off their guard. Should we set out now, we should in all probability find them prepared for an effective resistance."

"There's some reason in that, too," said Big Jake.

"How many of them are there?"

"Four, I think. And four resolute, well-armed men, behind the walls of a stout log hut, are pretty long odds in a fight."

"Especially if they are prepared," declared another of the thieves. "We must come down on them when they are not expecting us."

"That's sure!"

"But what if they should get away with the prisoners while we are waiting?" put in Big Jake, dubiously.

"Not at all likely," said Arkright, confidently.

"Why?"

"You must recollect that they sent their machines back to R—."

"I had forgotten that. Very good! Let them rest on in fancied security. It will remain for us to show them their mistake. They are fly, but we'll go them one better."

During the discussion the whisky had been circulating freely—and the more liquor there was consumed the greater was the boisterousness of the company.

Tom Arkright, perceiving how matters stood, thought it time to cut off the supplies.

"Come, my lads," he said. "This liquoring is going a little too far. If we get drunk, how are we going to rescue Bob and his pals? We must cry ago on the whisky—it ain't no good, anyhow, in an affair where it requires a cool head and a steady nerve."

The thieves owned that Arkright was right.

Then came an interruption which was entirely unlooked for—for just as the ruffians were preparing to leave the restaurant, there was a loud knocking on the door of the room.

Every voice became instantly hushed.

The company glanced from one to another as if for an explanation.

Even Arkright betrayed his uneasiness.

The knocking grew louder and more impatient.

There was evidently something wrong.

In an instant the lights were extinguished.

The thieves prepared to leave the apartment by the windows—from which they could escape into the alley—which, as the reader is already aware, was in the rear of the restaurant.

Rap!—rap!—rap!—rap!

"Silence! not a word!" whispered the landlord.

"Are you all deaf? Open the door and be hanged to you!" rung out a gruff voice from the passage-way.

Tom Arkright was the first to recover from his surprise.

"I'll swear that's Bill Mathews's voice," he ejaculated. "What the blazes brings him here?"

"It's all right, my lads," he added, as he went over to the door. "Up with the lights."

The door which Tom Arkright had secured on his entrance to the apartment was now unlocked.

"It's you, Bill—is it?" catching sight of the man who had rapped so impatiently.

"Yes, me—an' no one else. Why didn't you open the door sooner?" growled Mathews, as he passed into the room.

He was still unsteady on his legs from his frequent libations in the earlier part of the day. His face was fiery red, and his eyes bloodshot.

It was evident, too, that he was in a very gruff humor.

He glared at the company with a half-ferocious expression on his savage countenance.

Most of the men composing it he recognized—those he did not he looked at inquiringly.

Tom Arkright, observing his questioning look, assured Mathews that every man there was one of the right sort—and ended by formally introducing those whom the landlord of The Magpie had not met before.

"And now," proceeded Tom, "you will have no

objection, perhaps, to enlighten us as to your present visit."

"What! Do you expect a man to talk on a thirsty throttle?" was the surly response. "Let me have a good stiff drink, then I'll give you particulars."

Having satisfied himself in this respect, Mathews grew more companionable, giving a hurried account of what had taken place since the previous night.

"I fear something is wrong with Belcher," he continued. "I suspected all along that that fellow Bluff was no good. He's got Bob into a hole, if I'm not mistaken."

"You've just struck it," said Arkright. "Bluff, or whatever else he may call himself, is a Pinkerton agent."

"I thought as much—and Belcher is in his clutches."

"Exactly."

Then Tom Arkright in turn briefly narrated what had occurred in the restaurant.

"But all is not lost yet," he went on. "We have our trump card to play now, and it'll go darn hard if we don't give the cusses as good as they gave. But time is about up. We'll start at once."

"And what am I to do?" demanded the landlord of The Magpie.

"You need rest. Take my advice, and go to bed."

Bill Mathews being in no condition to take an active part in the enterprise, was after some little urging, prevailed upon to follow Arkright's advice.

Then the thieves emerged by the rear of the building into the alley; thence, after receiving final instructions, into the country road leading to the hut.

Here they paused, and listened for several moments, so as to catch the slightest noise.

But as no suspicious sounds met their ears, they stole softly forward through the grim darkness like so many shadows.

Notwithstanding all their precautions, however, their advance had been detected as we have already stated.

They little suspected the reception that awaited them at the cabin.

At last, when they got within a hundred yards of the hut, one of the party was sent forward to reconnoiter.

Appearances were so satisfactory in that direction that he returned to his comrades in the most jubilant spirits.

"Well," whispered Arkright, "how is it?"

"Couldn't be better. Finding the place in complete darkness, I crept up and listened."

"And you found them asleep?"

"I did—and snoring away as peacefully as if an enemy wasn't within a hundred miles of them."

Arkright gave his head a doubtful shake.

"That snoring racket isn't half natural," he said. "Something's wrong; and there was no light either, eh?" added he.

"Not a solitary spark. I could see nothing; in fact the inside of the hut was pitch dark. There's no doubt but it's all right, though," the man added, with confidence.

"Perhaps it is. Time will tell."

"You appear to have suspicions," spoke up Big Jake, somewhat impatiently.

"You're just right there—I have."

"For my part I don't see anything singular in the affair. The fellows are tired out—and, not expecting visitors, went to sleep as a matter of course. That's all there's to it. Suppose we make for the cabin without any more shilly-shallying?"

"Very good; but I warn you all to be prepared—and not to make targets of yourselves. We must keep scattered."

"The door is our objective point," said Jake.

"Once we get it open—the rest's easy sailing."

"Why not the windows?" interrupted the man who had gone forward to ascertain the state of affairs at the hut. "The door will no doubt be both barred and bolted—but there are at least two windows, which could be forced without much trouble."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I examined them."

"We'll get in, anyhow," declared Big Jake, resolutely. "If we can do this without exposing ourselves—so much the better. If no—well, we must take all the risks—Belcher and his pals shall go back with us—even if we have to burn the old shanty over their heads."

"One moment," said Arkright.

"Well?"

"Every move must be made with dispatch and quietly. As the windows are the easiest way of effecting an entrance, we must first try them. We are poor professionals if we can't get into the crib without giving an alarm. I have an opinion, however, that we are not going to have it as easy as you appear to think."

"Well, have you done chinning?" said Jake sneeringly. "For if you haven't, we'd better go back. All this talk is what I call a blank waste of time."

"That's so," said the rest of the thieves.

Tom Arkright, without being at all disconcerted, set the example by sealing noiselessly toward the hut.

The others followed.

They had got as far as the windows—when several flashes of flame broke through the grim darkness, followed by as many pistol-shots—the loud, whip-like cracks awaking a thousand echoes through the silent night.

The thieves, returning the fire, broke for a clump of timber bordering one side of the road.

Many of the window-panes of the cabin were shattered into fragments—but apparently no further damage was done to either side.

The pitchy gloom alone had saved Tom Arkright's party.

"Any one hurt?" asked Arkright.

The reply was in the negative.

"You see my suspicions were not unfounded," said Tom, with the air of a man of superior sagacity. "That snoring racket was too much overdone to be natural. We're confoundedly lucky the cusses didn't wing some of us."

Big Jake was somewhat crestfallen at the turn of events.

He quite agreed now that the rescuing of the prisoners was not such an easy matter.

"What's to be done?" he asked more humbly.

"Speak lower," said Arkright. "It won't do to give them an inkling of our next move."

"You are right."

"We have ample protection where we are."

"It would seem so."

"Well, we must mislead them."

"How?"

"There are eight of us, are there not?"

"Well?"

"We'll divide our force. Four for the front and four for the rear—and if we don't get the better of them, my name's not Arkright."

"Drive ahead."

"To create a diversion, we'll pepper away from behind those trees—that's four of us, while the other four sneak away in the darkness, and try to get in by the back windows."

"Are you sure there are back windows?"

"Positive. If not two—there is at least one—which will answer the purpose in view. Ha! they are opening the ball again!"

And as he spoke, the reports of several pistol-shots rung out from the cabin.

The bullets whistled harmlessly by or imbedded themselves in the trunks of the trees.

"Now, my lads, off with you," said Arkright, selecting four of his companions. "We'll keep pegging away, so they won't suspect the trick we are going to play them."

During the fusillade of shots which followed, the thieves indicated by Arkright made off through the darkness for the rear of the hut.

Was this move of the enemy suspected by its defenders?

CHAPTER XVII.

PRISONERS.

As we have seen, the attack of Arkright and his gang was not unexpected by those within the hut; and being prepared, they met the advance successfully.

The thieves' return fire did no harm, save the shattering of sundry panes of glass and the imbedding of several bullets in the rough logs of which the cabin was constructed.

"No one hit," said Trumble.

There was a cheery reply in the negative.

"Our shots went as wide of the mark as did theirs," said Nat. "It seems to one's hurt on their side either."

"It would appear not," answered Garnett. "At least we heard no cry—and if any of them had been wounded, we should have known it."

"You are right. It is impossible to fire accurately in the darkness. And by this time they are effectually protected by the trunks of the trees."

"We gave them a scare, nevertheless," said Garnett, with a quiet chuckle.

"Why, yes. They no doubt did not expect the reception they met."

"What will be their next move?"

"That we have to find out. A few shots will not make them forego an object on which they have set their hearts. They'll be at us again. So look out! Above all, avoid exposing yourselves unnecessarily."

The warning was not without reason.

The besieged kept as clear as possible of the windows—where chance shots might be the means of their number by one or more being diminished.

After waiting a few minutes or so Nat said:

"I should like to know what devilry they are up to now."

"They are suspiciously quiet," said Garnett.

"Yes—and planning the best means to surprise us—or I am much mistaken. That Arkright is no fool, believe me. Let's fire them a volley just to stir them up."

"A sheer waste of ammunition," demurred one of the New York agents.

"Not a bit of it. Besides it may give us some inkling as to their designs."

"Let's go, Gallagher!" said the Mexican, who seemed to enjoy the excitement of the attack, probably more than any of the others.

Bang—bang—bang! went four or five shots whistling in among the branches of the trees.

No damage done!

It appeared, however, to put the thieves on their mettle, for they returned the compliment with interest—and kept it up—though inflicting no other damage than that of shattering the remaining panes of glass.

Thus far the battle was bloodless.

Four of the Arkright party continued the firing so rapidly, that the real movement of taking the besieged in the rear was not as much as dreamed of by the occupants of the cabin.

"This rapid firing is to cover an advance of some sort," said Trumble. "They're up to some devil's game—that's certain."

"We must be in error as to their numbers," said

the Mexican. "They have over a dozen men at least, I should judge."

"Not unlikely. Though they were certainly not in the restaurant when we left it. It would be the height of folly to go out and meet them in the open."

That is what had been proposed by the two Pinkerton agents from New York—and as steadily opposed by Garnett, the Mexican and Nat Trumble.

By this time there was not a solitary pane of glass left whole—and still the bullets from the assailants' revolvers flew like hail into the hut.

It would have been decidedly hazardous to have stood in front of the windows while these deadly missiles kept whistling through the air.

Suddenly the firing ceased, and Garnett, stealing forward, endeavored to peer through the darkness into the road.

He looked in vain—he could see nothing but the deeper gloom of the opposite side—the thick boles and foliage of the timber rearing up in the inky blackness.

His arm was clutched by Nat—and he was drawn back out of range.

"Did you detect anything?"

"No. It is too confoundedly dark. Yet if they had been stealing toward the hut I should have heard them."

"They are planning some cunning stroke, you may depend. They expect by some deviltry to catch us napping."

"What do you conjecture?"

"That they are preparing to burn us out."

"What?"

"To set fire to the hut."

"Set fire to the hut!" they all exclaimed, aghast.

"Yes—either that or attack us in the rear. That useless firing was not persisted in for nothing. It was done in order to create a diversion for some object. What that object is we have yet to discover."

Strange as it may seem, no one had thought up to this of an attack in the rear—and the simple hint of being roasted alive was horrible.

The two New York Pinkerton men at once rushed to the shattered windows—and in spite of the fact that they might be the recipients of some stray bullets, they stood there eying the road excitedly.

Again came a shower of lead that narrowly missed their heads, and they thought it wiser to withdraw to safe distance.

The Mexican who had reloaded his revolver, fired several shots once more into the timber.

Then rung out on the night a yell of pain—whether simulated or real was a question the defenders could not answer.

One of the rascals appears to have got his quietus," observed Garnett, with stern satisfaction.

"I sincerely hope so," said Trumble. "And yet that cry seemed to me as if it was feigned."

"And to me also," declared the Mexican, who had stolen forward to survey the road.

Perceiving not the vestige of any moving object in the darkness, he returned quickly to his companions.

He reminded them that the back of the cabin was undefended.

"There is one window there," he said, "by which the thieves could effect an easy entrance—and so liberate the prisoners before we could possibly prevent them."

It was decided now that two of their number should take up position at the unguarded window—while Garnett, Trumble and the remaining New York man could overawe the thieves in front—and deter them from piling any combustibles against the front of the cabin.

Had this been thought of earlier the chances are that the attacking party would have been discomfited—obliged in fact to return to R—without having effected the object of their journey.

As it was, this action on the part of the defenders came too late.

Four of Arkright's band of cut-throats having taken a circuitous route through the inky gloom—and assisted by the firing of their comrades in front—managed to get to the back of the hut, without attracting the least attention.

As the firing from the timber was kept up, Big Jake skillfully pried open the solitary window and crept softly into the room.

He was followed by the others with equal stealth.

Then a single gleam of a dark lantern disclosed the recumbent forms of Bob Belcher and his pals—bound and gagged—unable to move hand or foot.

"Not a word," whispered Jake, as he proceeded to release the prisoners.

This, after some little trouble, was effected.

The mask of the lantern was then slid softly into its place—and weapons slipped into the hands of the rescued outlaws.

The five men (two had returned to the outside) maintained a death-like silence, preparatory to surprising the defenders in the front room—a prospect of which caused them the most ferocious joy—for then indeed could they have the fullest measure of their revenge.

The entrance into the cabin had been so easily accomplished, that those who had taken part in it could have laughed outright at the folly of its defenders, but that they were re-trained by more prudent motives.

As Big Jake and his comrades were preparing to rush into room number one, they paused irresolutely as they heard stealthy steps in room number two.

The footfalls drew nearer.

"Here they come," said Jake, in the same cautious tones as previously used. "Be prepared to pounce on them as they open the door."

"Why not let drive at them with our revolvers?" came in a hoarse whisper from one of the thieves.

"No—no," remonstrated Belcher. "We must take them alive. I have a bone to pick with Garnett—curse him!"

"Silence!" said Jake. "You'll spoil all. Ha!"

Just then the door of the room was thrown open, and the Mexican and Pinkerton agent passed over the threshold.

"Now!" hissed a voice out of the darkness.

The new-comers found it too late to retreat—and, before they could recover from their surprise, they were grasped in strong arms and thrown heavily to the ground.

In the short struggle that ensued the Mexican's pistol went off with a loud bang.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DANGER INCREASES.

THE sudden firing of the Mexican's revolver did no damage, excepting to send a bullet into the rude woodwork of the hut—though it came within an ace of finding a lodgment in Big Jake's head.

Jake was the man who bore the Mexican to the ground.

There was no doubt but the discharge of the firearm was quite accidental.

This did not mend matters, however—instead, it completely upset the thieves' plans, whose object it was to so come at the other occupants of the hut as to make their resistance useless.

"Curse the luck!" growled Jake. "Our trouble is only commencing."

The Mexican and Pinkerton man got so roughly handled by their assailants as to render them insensible.

While in this condition they were quickly bound and gagged.

They were then unceremoniously thrust through the window into the arms of the two men outside the hut.

Meanwhile what was occurring in the front room? The unexpected detonation of the exploded weapon warned Garnett and his companions that something serious was amiss—that in fact the outlaws had either effected an entrance by the rear window, or were attempting to do so.

They heard the muffled sounds of the struggle, and were appalled by the ominous silence that followed.

What did it mean?

Had some of the attacking party really gained access to the cabin during the hubbub occasioned by the continuous fusillade from the timber?

If so, the prisoners must be free, while the Mexican and his comrade had fallen victims to the rascals' cunning.

This could be the only explanation.

If a correct one, their situation was perilous indeed!

What was to be done under the circumstances? They could not hope to successfully cope with enemies in front and rear simultaneously.

For a time they might hold them in check—but a certainty of capture caused them much anxious thought.

If the worst came, they must find some means to get away.

But how?

This question puzzled them sadly.

Were they but once outside the hut they could possibly steal away unperceived in the darkness—but as it was they were effectually cooped in—in truth surrounded by foes on all sides.

Such were the reflections that sped through their agitated minds—even before their two friends had been passed through the window.

"I can see no very bright prospect before us," said Trumble, despairingly. "If the worst comes we must sell our lives dearly."

"We won't let them take us alive anyhow," said Garnett, in a resolute tone. "Courage! All is not lost while we have the means to keep the road clear."

"The windows must be guarded narrowly."

"Decidedly. And we mustn't lose sight of the road for a moment."

They had recovered from the stupefaction which had succeeded the premature pistol-shot—and now they were really hopeful of making a successful resistance in spite of the fact of opposing superior numbers.

Time was everything.

Nat at once assigned the Pinkerton agent to overlook the road.

This post grew more important as their peril increased—and as the Pinkerton man had two seven-shooters—with every chamber loaded—he was considered a host in himself.

"Bang away at the first moving object you see," was the order.

"Very good. Nothing living will cross the road, while I am here," answered the man firmly—and he meant, too, what he said.

All this occurred in a fraction of the time we take to describe it.

The ball opened sooner than was expected.

Bang—bang! went two shots at an indistinct figure on the skirts of the road.

The second shot was succeeded by a yell of agony.

One of the gang had been wounded without doubt—but whether fatally or not was a question.

The Pinkerton man's prompt act had served its purpose, two or three bullets came whistling into the hut—after which the firing ceased.

Meanwhile Garnett and Nat were not idle.

The light of a dark-lantern disclosed that they could effectually bar the ingress of their foes from the rear—as the door was quite ponderous, with two stout bolts, and a strong wooden bar for additional security.

There was no time to discuss the Mexican's motive for this extraordinary precaution.

The bolts were shot into their sockets, and the bar affixed in its place in a twinkling.

It was accomplished none too soon—for a second later Big Jake and his rascally pals were thundering at the door.

"Hello!—you fellows in there!" came his gruff voice, echoing into the room.

"Don't answer," whispered Nat. "The devil is trying to get at our location—so that he can shoot with some certainty."

"The door is too solid for him to do much harm," said Garnett, confidently.

"That may be true. But it's wiser to run no risks."

Not relying on the thickness of the door altogether, they stood on one side, and awaited the next move of the enemy.

"Confound you! Can't you answer? Do you hear me in there?"

Receiving no reply, Jake lost the little patience he had.

"Open it, or it will be worse for you!"

Still there was no response.

Then came a succession of resounding strokes as if from some very heavy implement.

But they soon desisted from this kind of work when they found it made no impression on the substantial barrier beyond the din occasioned.

"So you won't open, eh? Then take that!"

"That" meant several pistol-shots tearing through the panels.

No one was hurt, however.

The bullets were spent, in fact, before they passed through the sturdy timber.

In any event, if they happened to strike the defenders, they could only have inflicted very slight wounds.

"Good," said Nat. "The door is more substantial than I supposed."

"It's solid," said Garnett, "and I should judge several inches in thickness. They'll soon discover the folly of wasting ammunition in that way."

Little did Nat and Garnett suspect, however, the real strength of the force opposed to them, especially that portion of it which was acting from behind the boles of the trees.

They could easily have repulsed any attack from the little piece of woods, as two of the thieves had been wounded by the firing from the hut.

The Pinkerton man's last shot had completely disabled one of the ruffians, who was even then lying unconscious in the rank grass and undergrowth of the timber.

Tom Arkright concluded that the men he had dispatched to the rear of the cabin had effected their object; also that their surprise of its occupants was partially successful.

But as things were then, he was helpless to render them any effective aid.

Of course, he saw the wisdom of concealing the true state of his affairs from Garnett and his party, and it was to this purpose he so promptly returned the fire of the guard at the window.

While cogitating on the policy of playing a waiting game, one of Big Jake's men arrived from the hut.

"Well," said Arkright, with some impatience, "have you succeeded?"

"In a measure, yes." And the man gave a brief account of what occurred, and the great difficulty of gaining access to the front room.

"Can't you batter the door down?" said Tom.

"I guess not. They tried it, and failed. The woodwork is so thick and hard that it seems impossible to make any impression. A bullet will pierce it, of course, but by the time it gets to the other side, it's about as useless as so much dough—in fact, beyond doing any great harm. Had we a stout log to use as a battering ram, we'd have the door off its hinges in less than no time."

"Then hunt around and get one," snorted Arkright.

"That's what I have been doing, but I might as well hunt for a needle in a haystack for that matter."

"Ain't there an ax somewhere 'round—I mean in the hut?"

"I don't know. It's strange none of us thought of that."

"Yes, it is somewhat singular," rejoined Arkright, with sneering emphasis. "You can bet your life a woodchopper's cabin isn't without an ax. Return to the hut at once, and find one. You see how I am fixed," he added, as he pointed to the unconscious man at his feet. "I fear poor Bill is done for. He's got a bullet in his head."

The man hastily left the spot and was soon swallowed up in the darkness.

CHAPTER XIX.

ENCOUNTER ON THE ROAD.

THE peril of the defenders of the cabin increased now as every moment sped.

That they were narrowly watched from the cover of the timber Garnett was certain—though there was no indication that such was the fact—for an oppressive silence seemed to have taken possession of the entire surroundings.

How they would have liked just then to have seen the occasional flash of a firearm, even—but for any such sign they now waited in vain.

All was ominously quiet—both in front and rear.

Their assailants in Room Two, seeing the futility of wasting ammunition on the door, had withdrawn quietly to Room Three—there to discuss their future action.

While thus engaged, the man who had been dispatched by Arkright in search of an ax, appeared.

He explained his errand and a search was made for the needed implement.

It was finally discovered under a rickety table.

The ax was new, with an edge keen as that of a razor.

"Just the thing," said Big Jake, with grim satisfaction. "It's surprising none of us thought of it before. That Arkright's a trump, and no mistake. Now which of you can cut down a sapling without making too much noise?"

Belcher replied that he had considerable experience at chopping down trees—away in the forests of Maine—when he was presumably an honest man.

"You'll do," said Jake. "The two of you had better go back to Arkright at once, and he'll post you. We must not let the fly cops get away—for Tom's sake."

"You are right," said Bob, and off he hurried with the messenger, by the circuitous route previously taken by the latter.

This was done for two reasons—first to avoid any shots which might be fired from the front windows of the cabin, and in the second place to keep its defenders in ignorance of what was really going on.

"Now," said Arkright, when Belcher and his companion came up, "you must do your work some distance from the hut. About a couple of hundred yards from here, you'll find a small grove skirting the highway. There are plenty of young trees there, and you can make your selection. Be careful, however, of making too much noise, or you'll have those devils inside there suspicious of what's going on. And once they have an inkling of the surprise in store for them, they will get away sure, which would knock my little game higher than a kite."

"The restaurant?"

"Yes."

"Very good. I'll warrant you'll have no fault to find as to the way the job is done," said Belcher, with great confidence. "I see you are badly fixed here," he added, as his attention was called to the wounded outlaws.

"Yes; very badly fixed. Poor Bill is utterly oblivious to everything. I fear he's dying. As to Ben, he's past being of any help—his arm is broken. Now away with you, and do your work quietly. Above all don't cut one down you can't carry—for that would be worse than cutting none."

"All right."

Next moment the two men vanished in the gloom. In the meantime let us return to the front room of the hut.

Succeeding Big Jake's efforts to force the door, came a quiet as of the grave—causing much anxiety to Garnett and his friends—as we have already noted.

As the moments passed their fears increased.

Anything would be preferable to this death-like stillness.

Besides, night was wearing apace, and dawn would arrive, to find them in a more precarious situation than ever.

What was to be done?

They listened for sounds, but none came.

The Pinkerton agent was still at his post—motionless as a statue—his keen eyes endeavoring to penetrate the profound gloom beyond.

He could see nothing—in fact hear nothing.

"Strange!" whispered Nat Trumble.

"What's strange?"

"This mysterious quiet. It's evident they're up to some new plan. The firing convincing them that that part of the programme was impracticable. They are hatching a more feasible scheme, depend upon it."

"I agree with you there," said Garnett. "It seems to me that we are in a precious bad fix. For my part I don't see what good we're doing by remaining. Our two friends are captured beyond a doubt—and what's more we cannot aid them by cooping ourselves up in this fashion. Besides, if we stay till daylight, our chances of escape will be correspondingly slim."

"You take a gloomy view and I confess I do, too. Let us decide quickly what we are to do."

Saying which Trumble stealthily approached the door.

Lowering his head he listened intently.

A murmur of voices evidently proceeding from the rear room—floated on his hearing; but though phenomenally keen of hearing, he could not make out a single word of what was being said—and very naturally so, as the door of Room Three was closed.

Unable to discover the tenor of the thieves' talk he returned to Garnett.

"Well?" whispered the latter.

"They are in the rear apartment—but I cannot understand a word of what they are saying. Hark!" Nat whispered, suddenly. "What do you make of that?"

As he spoke muffled sounds floated in through the shattered windows, as if from a distance.

"They seem like the strokes of an ax," said Garnett, after listening for some moments earnestly. "I may be mistaken though."

"No, you are not. There they go, at regular intervals. We could hear them more distinctly perhaps—but whatever breeze there is, is conveying the sound directly away from us. Now I think I've got the key to all this perplexing inactivity," added Nat.

"You have?"

"Yes. I am positive of it. Do you know what the rascals are doing?"

"I can guess they are chopping down a tree."

"Exactly—and for our especial benefit, too."

"In what way?"

"To use it as a battering-ram on that door. To deceive us as to their intentions, it's being done at some distance. They'll be here presently to put the

finishing stroke on their work. Now, as I don't propose we shall be caught, we must get away from here—and the sooner the better."

"Can we do so without being peppered by the rascals in the timber?"

"I think so. We must try anyhow. We have one thing at least in our favor—the darkness."

"Quite so," replied Garnett. "But I propose giving them a few shots before we start."

"No—no," objected Nat. "All would be a waste of powder and lead which we can badly afford at present."

By this time the muffled sounds of the ax's strokes had died away on the night.

"The first part of the programme is completed," said Nat. "Let us go."

"I scarcely think it right to leave those men in the ruffians' clutches," said Garnett hesitatingly.

"Good heavens! what can we do? By remaining here we'll be either killed or captured as sure as a gun! By escaping we'll be the means of getting our friends out of a hole—that is if they have not been already done for, which I hardly think likely. Come! Let us waste not an instant in useless discussion—or all is lost."

A word from Nat, and the New York Pinkerton agent left his post.

Then deftly removing the fastenings of the front door, they as noiselessly opened it and stole out in the inky darkness.

Their escape from the hut had not been observed, so that they continued their way unmolested until they had left the rude structure two or three hundred yards behind them.

Then they drew up and listened.

Not a sound broke upon the intense quiet.

"It is evident they think we are there still," said Trumble. "Well, let them think so. And now to foot it to R—as quickly as possible. Once there, I'll drum up a sufficient force to turn the tables on Arkright and his gang."

And on they went without another word.

They had not gone very far down the road, however, when they were surrounded by armed men—who seemed literally to have sprung from the bowels of the earth.

Before they could even move, each man's arms were pinioned behind his back.

Then two dazzling shafts of light shot through the gloom.

"Sold, by Jove!" cried a voice. "We've collared our friends instead of the Arkright people."

"Yes, you certainly have made a mistake," declared Trumble, cheerfully—"but you are by no means late to rectify it. I am glad you have come—for we badly need your assistance. The tables have turned, friend Garnett—and let us be thankful for it."

The sudden dazzling flashes of light came from the bull's-eyes of two dark lanterns whose masks had been slid back, on the summoning of Gyles Garnett and his friends.

CHAPTER XX.

BIG JAKE GETS SUSPICIOUS.

BUT who were the strangers who arrived so opportunely?

Let us explain.

The reader will recollect, no doubt, the boy sent by Arkright to shadow the hack.

A shrewd lad he was, and had done his work very creditably up to a certain point, but, on quitting his perch after the return journey he had been seen.

The driver of the second hack—a particularly sharp fellow—whistled softly as he saw the boy passing into the restaurant.

"So we have been followed, eh?" he muttered, "and by a spy of that rascal Arkright's."

When the vehicles had driven down one of the side streets, driver number two signaled to driver number one.

Then the hacks stopped.

The drivers sprung off into the road.

"Well?" said driver number one.

"We have been followed," said driver number two.

"I guessed as much. I caught sight of that young limb of Arkright's as he entered the restaurant—and I suspected that he had been taking a ride with us."

"Confound the young whelp!—that's what he just did. I saw him as he dropped from his perch into the street. 'Tis well he was seen, or there would have been the very deuce to pay."

"Of course Arkright knows all by this time."

"Yes, and will be preparing a move on the cabin. We must prevent that."

"Certainly. What do you propose?"

"First let us go to the stables."

The drivers mounted their cabs again and drove off.

Ten minutes later they were closeted with the chief of the police of R—.

To him they briefly explained all that had occurred and asked his advice.

"How many men has Arkright?" was his first question.

"Nine or ten, perhaps," replied driver number one, "and every man a criminal of the worst type."

"All New Yorkers?"

"Yes. The majority ex-convicts."

"That settles it," said the chief after a few moments' reflection. "We must gather a force at least equal to theirs and as well armed."

The police force of R—, it being a rather small town, consisted of about a dozen men all told.

The services of half this force were secured at once, as well as in many more special officers.

Each man was instructed to report in plain clothes, and armed to the teeth.

The chief knew it was no child's play he had engaged in—and every possible means was taken to make his mission a success.

In the first place the two hackmen were sent forward to keep a watch on the restaurant, until the force was ready to start—as well as to report any move of Tom Arkright, or any member of his gang.

One of the men watched the rear of the building from the darkness of the alleyway, so that no one could pass out in that direction without being seen—for they reasoned that any expedition leaving the restaurant, would, in order not to attract attention, leave it by the back entrance.

It was while driver number one watched the front of the restaurant from the shadow of the buildings opposite, that he saw Bill Mathews, partially intoxicated, stagger through the doorway.

Mathews, as it happened, was well known to him, and his unexpected appearance, in the condition described, gave the hackman fresh food for reflection.

"Now, what is Mathews doing here? He's up to no good, that's certain."

Soon the chief came along.

"Anything new?"

"Yes," and he told him about Mathews.

The chief went round to the rear of the restaurant.

The man on watch reported that nothing had occurred as yet.

"Keep a keen outlook. If they leave at all they are sure to leave by the rear." Saying which the officer took himself off.

The time sped on until Arkright and his gang emerged into the alley.

The lynx-eyed driver seeing them, concealed himself till they had passed, then hurried off to report to the chief what he had seen.

After that Arkright and his companion were stealthily followed by another of the party, in the direction of the Mexican's hut.

On his return journey the man—who was a police officer, met with an adventure.

As he was passing a clump of bushes he was pounced upon by two dark figures, who seemed to have sprung up from the very earth.

As quick as thought he was borne to the ground—bound and gagged.

Then a light was flashed into the captured officer's face, followed by a low, startled cry from one of his assailants.

"What's the matter?" demanded the second man.

"Who is he?"

"My brother—Jim Manning!" gasped the first.

"Remove the gag! release him!"

This was quickly done.

The recognition had been mutual, and Jim Manning, who had been thrown with considerable violence, was helped to his feet—nor did he feel much the worse as he stood clasped in his brother's arms.

Of course there came mutual explanations, the result of this unexpected encounter.

Dan Manning was the notorious counterfeit engraver—a member of Bill Mathews's gang—to whom the reader was introduced the night of Gyles Garnett's visit to The Magpie.

The brothers had not met in a good many years—not, indeed, since Dan had left the straight path, to become the engraver of spurious bank-notes.

Dan Manning's companion was one of the celebrated Pinkerton brothers.

The detective had known the counterfeiter well and favorably in the past—but that was many years before he took to evil ways and dishonest companions.

He was, in a manner of speaking, the great detective's prisoner—but was promised immunity on the condition that he aided in breaking up the terrible band of counterfeiters, whose acknowledged chief was the tavern-keeper, Bill Mathews.

It was no easy matter to obtain Manning's promise; but once his word was pledged, the detective knew that he could rely on it—for, though Dan was a desperate criminal, he was never known to break any promise he had made.

The police officer they had mistaken, in the darkness, for one of Tom Arkright's men—or to be more accurate, for Bill Mathews himself.

Indeed, the detective seemed to be pretty well posted as to the movements of that worthy, during the previous day and ensuing night.

Jim Manning on his side explained the nature of his errand when pounced upon by the two men—all of which, of course, occasioned some delay.

The three men now hastened back to meet the chief of police of R—.

The chief was awaiting his scout's return with much impatience, and was somewhat surprised to see him accompanied by two strangers.

"Ah, you have come at last. Who have you with you?"

"This gentleman will explain," was the officer's sententious reply.

Pinkerton, on being appealed to, did so briefly.

"Come," he said, "by hastening our steps, we may capture every man of Tom Arkright's gang."

This was a sufficient incentive.

The entire party went forward in the direction of the woodchopper's—with the result we have already witnessed—the capture and subsequent speedy liberation of Gyles Garnett and his two friends.

Then on again they proceeded, as noiselessly and silently as so many shadows.

Meanwhile let us take a peep in at the hut.

The escape of the occupants of the front room had not been discovered as yet; and Big Jake gloated over the surprise in store for the "fly cops," as he termed them.

Bob Belcher and his companion had already arrived with the means of forcing the ponderous door—the "battering-ram," cut from the little grove.

"Two of you had better join Arkright," said Big Jake, "and tackle the cusses in front, while we do ditto in rear."

This duty was assigned to Bob Belcher and one of his pals.

"They'll try to escape by the front door—so be prepared to make it hot for them," was Jake's grim order.

"As hot as lead or cold steel can make it," was Bob Belcher's response, as he left by the rear window with his comrade.

Then two of the most powerful men in the party laid hold of the "ram."

Big Jake opened the door and went into Room Two, followed by the rest of the thieves—one of whom carried a lighted lantern.

A suspicious stillness prevailed in front.

"The cops must have gone to sleep," whispered Jake, jocosely. "It's almost a shame to disturb them—but here goes." Then in a loud voice:

"Hello! Wake up and open the door! Eh? D'ye hear?"

No response.

The stillness seemed, if possible, to intensify.

"Hello! Hello! Hello, there!"

In vain did Big Jake's gruff voice ring through the cabin.

Not a sound from the front room came in answer.

The thieves looked from one to the other inquiringly.

They did not like to suspect that the birds had flown—that they had been hoodwinked, duped.

Even Big Jake's ugly face grew somewhat longer than was its wont.

A dreadful oath escaped his lips.

"Come, boys—let the cusses have a little of the ram!" he shouted.

But, nevertheless, he began to suspect that something had gone wrong.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT THE MAGPIE TAVERN.

"Now, boys—let her go!" said Big Jake.

Crash!

Crash!

Crash!

A thousand echoes winged through the cabin at each stroke of the ponderous log.

Then followed the sharp reports of two or three pistol-shots from the little piece of woods skirting the road.

But not a sound issued from the front room.

Three more terrific crashes from the improvised "ram"—then the stout door was hurled from its hinges and fell a shattered mass into the apartment beyond. The thieves rushed pell-mell over the fallen debris of the splintered door—the light of their lantern flashing weirdly through a cloud of dust that arose.

One look.

The apartment was empty.

Their anticipated victims had as effectually vanished as though they had never existed!

A horrible oath from Big Jake, and exclamations of rage and disappointment from his companions saluted the ears of Tom Arkright and those who had come out from the timber with him.

For a time the utmost confusion reigned—preventing, of course, any definite plan being adopted as to the pursuit of the men who had so cleverly eluded them.

But their troubles had only begun, as the sequel proved.

While in the midst of the most horrible imprecations, Pinkerton and his party stole up and surrounded the hut.

First they secured the man who guarded the Mexican and the Pinkerton agent—and having liberated the prisoners, turned their attention to the ruffians inside the cabin.

They took them front and rear—some entering by the back window of Room Three, while their comrades passed in simultaneously from the road.

Advancing on the outlaws with drawn weapons, they completely surprised and overwhelmed them—so much so indeed that they were incapable of offering even the most feeble resistance.

At Pinkerton's order each man sullenly delivered up his arms.

Then their hands were securely bound, and they were led into the road.

"You have a wounded man or two, I understand," said the chief of the R— police, addressing Tom Arkright, who took his arrest with more coolness than might have been expected.

"Yes," was the calm reply—"one wounded and one dead. You will find them among the trees yonder."

Two of the police officers went searching through the timber with lighted lanterns.

They came across the man who had been shot through the head.

He was cold and rigid in death!

But the wounded outlaw was not to be seen.

Badly injured as he was he had managed to escape.

They did not concern themselves much about him, however, and returned to the road.

"Well?" said the chief, addressing them.

"Arkright told the truth. One of them is dead."

"And the other?"

"Has got away. He's not in the timber, as we made a rigid search. He must have heard us, and bolted."

"If the rascal's seriously wounded, he'll not go far," declared their leader. "I don't think we need

wait longer, Mr. Pinkerton," he went on, indicating the approach of dawn, which was just beginning to break in the east. "It will be broad daylight when we get to R—."

Dan Manning, at Pinkerton's suggestion, kept aloof from the rest of the party, as he was known to Belcher and two or three of the other prisoners.

Leaving two men in the neighborhood of the cabin to capture the missing outlaw should he be discovered, the others set out with their prisoners—Dan Manning and his brother following at some distance in the rear.

The sun had just risen when they entered the town; but as few of the towns-people were up they reached the police station without attracting special notice.

Having disposed of their prisoners, they raided the restaurant.

Room after room was searched without result.

Where was Mathews?

Had he escaped?

There was an apartment in the upper part of the building looking out on the alleyway—this up to the present had escaped their notice.

"He must be there and asleep," said Garnett.

"A willer fox never slept," put in Nat Trumble. "Ten to one he has given us the slip."

Two of the party descended the stairs, and hurried into the alleyway.

Garnett quietly tried the room door.

He found it locked.

Then he knocked softly.

Not as much as a sound from the other side came back.

"In with the door!" cried Pinkerton. "We have wasted too much precious time already."

"Lend a hand, Nat," said Gyles. "So!"

Two brawny shoulders sent the door in with a crash.

The officers rushed in.

But they might have spared themselves the trouble—the bird had flown.

Bill Mathews had escaped by the open window, by the aid of a stout rope which had been secured to the ponderous, old-fashioned bedstead.

"He's gone," said Garnett, as the men came back from their fruitless search of the alleyway.

"Yes, the cunning old rascal's given us the slip, that's sure."

"But he can't have got very far," declared Nat. "I'll make for the depot, and see he doesn't get away by any of the trains."

Dan Manning, who had proven quite friendly with both Trumble and Garnett, objected.

"You may spare yourself the trouble," he said. "The station will be the very last place Mathews will go to. He's not such a fool as to risk his precious liberty in that way. It's more likely he'll cut across to a depot miles away from R—; but you may depend he'll get back to The Magpie as quickly as he can. The Magpie is your objective point—you'll collar him there, sure."

"What a precious rascal!" thought Garnett and Nat.

But, they were unaware of the enmity that existed between the two men.

In fact the friendship of Mathews for Dan Manning was only on the surface. In reality they hated each other bitterly, appearances to the contrary, notwithstanding, but it is unnecessary at this late stage of the story to enter into details as to its cause.

Pinkerton reflected for a moment or two, then said:

"Dan is right. We must get to the old tavern before Bill gets there."

And this was the opinion of the rest of the party.

"The next train is an Express," explained Jim Manning, who appeared to be well posted. "It stops at a little wayside station, some two and a half miles the other side of the Magpie."

"Then we'll go by it," said Pinkerton. "How long have we to wait?"

The officer consulted a time-table.

"Ten minutes," he replied. "And it's generally on time too."

"Very good. Let us start."

When the Express steamed into R—, eight men boarded it.

When it reached the little wayside station for the purpose of watering, they got off—and were led by Dan Manning, by a short cut—in the direction of the tavern.

The path chosen by the engraver was an unfrequented one.

Still their way across fields and along narrow lanes was not unobserved.

Without being aware of it, they had one fellow traveler from R—, Tom Arkright's sharp-eyed boy!

The shrewd little fellow allowed them to leave the station, then, as the train was on the point of steaming away on its journey, he took another and nearer path.

He was perfectly familiar with the country, and, being both cunning and fleet of foot, he reached his destination long before Pinkerton and his party appeared.

He was almost breathless from his exertions when he entered the tavern.

Four of the gang of counterfeiters, luckily for themselves, were present—awaiting the arrival of Mathews with considerable impatience not to say misgivings.

And Jerry's flurried and breathless appearance caused them greater anxiety than ever.

A torrent of questions were hurled at the boy.

He explained hurriedly all that had occurred.

"You've not a moment to lose," he continued, excitedly. "I ran all the way so as to prepare you

for their coming. They'll be here in less than a quarter of an hour."

"And Dan Manning leads them, eh?" exclaimed one of the men, white with rage.

"Yes."

"Curse the traitor! Who'd have thought the skunk would turn on us so? Mathews was right—that Dan's nothing but a white-livered cur!"

"Cursing Manning will do no good," said the lad, naively.

"The boy is right," declared another of the counterfeiters. "If we stay here we'll share the fate of Arkright and his pals. The Magpie is no longer safe for us—we must get."

"What! and leave the old tavern in the hands of the cops?" demurred one of the others. "Not if I know it. If it won't hold us it won't hold them. I vote to send it sky-high."

"But Mathews's wife and daughter?"

It was Jerry who spoke.

"They are in Colbeck, fortunately," was the reply. "It will never shelter them again—so what's the use of hesitating?"

"It must be done," echoed the others—"and quickly."

"Dynamite works like a charm, they say—we'll see."

"Above all, time the fuse for our very dear friends," put in another of the party, sarcastically.

With this two of the men rushed down into the cellars.

They had a quantity of the terrible explosive stored there—"just for such an occasion," one of the ruffians remarked, with a hideous attempt at humor.

Presently the two men who had entered the cellar returned.

"It's all fixed," said they. "We fancy the cops and Mister Manning will have more than they ever bargained for. They came here to send us up, and we only reverse the programme by sending them up—sky-high—ha! ha!"

Jerry and the four counterfeiters now stealthily left the doomed tavern, and concealed by a tall quickset hedge, disappeared in a bend of the road.

The foregoing was done in a tithe of the time we take to describe it.

Let us now return to the advancing party led by Pinkerton and Dan Manning.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

On came the officers, little suspecting the terrible danger that menaced them.

At last they drew up on the brow of a hill, overlooking the tavern.

This eminence was crowned by tall pine trees, from among which they could make observations without attracting attention—the foliage and thick undergrowth effectually concealing them from any one who might happen to be below.

From where they had halted The Magpie was about three hundred and fifty yards; and Pinkerton and his party had reached that point simultaneously with the disappearance of the boy Jerry and the four counterfeiters.

They saw nothing to arouse their suspicions, for the moment—neither, indeed, did they hear anything to cause them uneasiness.

"The tavern is mighty quiet," said Gyles Garnett, breaking the silence which had been observed for some moments by the party.

"Yes, suspiciously so," put in Dan Manning, with emphasis. "No one seems to be moving even. Perhaps the Mathews family are away from home—his wife and daughter I mean—and there are certainly none of my late pals there."

"They're not usually so quiet then?" put in Pinkerton, shading his eyes with his hands from the bright glare of the sunlight.

"No. On the contrary they are very boisterous—that is when the boys are around," he added, naively.

"The fact is," continued Dan, after a pause, "they lead the jolliest kind of life; and the sounds of laughter and sometimes quarreling might be heard at all hours day and night. Bill Mathews is not often troubled with visitors, outside the 'profess'; decent people giving the place as wide a berth as possible, in consequence of its bad name. I cannot understand this unusual calm, though."

"Nor I either," said Trumble. "My experience of the place tallies with Manning's. I shouldn't wonder if there's some surprise in store for us."

"A surprise?" echoed his companions.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll explain briefly. In mastering the intricacies of the secret passages, with which the tavern abounds—some of which were known to me previously—I ran across some infernal machines, stowed away in the cellars. Further investigation proved that these contained sufficient nitro-glycerine to blow the old building into a million fragments. The landlord's daughter, Mina, was likewise aware of their existence; and in a ramble through the den asked me what they contained. Not wishing to alarm her, I professed ignorance. My intention was to destroy their effectiveness by some means, and—"

Nat Trumble never completed the sentence.

For just then a terrific rumbling seemed to issue from the very bowels of the earth.

The ground rocked and quaked beneath their feet!

Then followed an explosion of such a tremendous and frightful character as to deprive them of their senses!

They were thrown in the long rank grass with great violence; and on returning to consciousness

they beheld the terrible havoc that had been made for hundreds of yards around them.

A clump of timber, within fifty yards of The Magpie, had almost completely disappeared.

The evidences of the explosion were visible everywhere.

As to the tavern itself, not a vestige of it remained.

In a manner of speaking it had been ground into an impalpable powder—even its sturdy foundations had been swept away—as feathers on the breast of a mighty wind.

Considering the destruction wrought by the explosion, the escape of the Pinkerton party—outside of a few bruises—seemed almost miraculous!

Iron-nerved as the majority of them were it took them some time to recover from this terrible experience.

"The delay on this knoll has saved our lives," said Nat, wiping the perspiration from his bruised face. In fact I believe a trap had been set for us—from which, thank Providence, we have luckily escaped."

"Then Mathews must have got here before us," said Garnett. "Though I can hardly credit he would have blown up his own house. He didn't seem to me to be the kind of man that would bite off his nose to spite his face. However I don't see the good of staying here. Let us visit the 'Old Manse' as its called—Manning's familiar with its location, and can guide us."

"What, to run the risk of a second explosion?" exclaimed Dan, aghast.

"Remember your promise," prompted Pinkerton, sternly. "By guiding us you secure your liberty. As we have begun—let us finish *ored tably*."

"Very well," said Dan with assumed indifference. "A promise is a promise. I have never broken one yet and won't now."

So on the party hurried with the same tenacity of purpose as before the explosion took place.

The "Manse"—or counterfeiting den—was fully two miles and a half from where the tavern once stood.

It was a rambling old structure, in a half ruinous condition, and bore among the simple country people the reputation of being haunted.

No one could prevail on them to approach it after nightfall; and even in the broad daylight they avoided it as they would a plague-spot.

Bill Mathews and his gang did what they could to foster this feeling of terror, so that the real character of the place was never so much as suspected.

The Pinkerton men, led by Dan Manning, advanced very cautiously, and halted frequently to take observations.

But their movements did not escape the sharp eyes that followed them.

Jerry, from a safe vantage point in the branches of a tall oak, had watched for the explosion, and had witnessed the escape of the officers from death.

As the Pinkerton party descended the hill, he followed their movements as long as it was safe, then made off with all the speed of his wiry legs until he overtook the counterfeiter.

He briefly described what he had seen.

They held a hurried consultation.

"It's no use," said one of the gang, "the 'Manse' must go! We must get out of this part of the country, and that quickly."

As the den was of no further use, they decided to destroy it as they had done the tavern—but judged it wiser to blow it up before the arrival of Manning and the officers.

Not, indeed, that they were troubled with any scruples on the score of humanity, but the case of The Magpie served as a precedent by which they could regulate their conduct.

Besides, if by any possible chance they were captured, they concluded that they would not be dealt with so severely as they would be if any of the officers were killed.

"We'll attend to that traitor Manning later on," thought they, "and our revenge shall be terrible!"

Without further delay they hastened on to the "Manse"—where we leave them, to follow the fortunes of the advancing Pinkerton people.

They had completed nearly two-thirds of their journey to the den, when they saw the figure of a woman stealthily approaching.

She had emerged suddenly from the corner of a group of alders, a few hundred paces in their front. Had their advance been seen?

It undoubtedly had—for she waved a white handkerchief several times wildly in their direction—then darted forward to meet them.

Three of the party knew her.

It was Bill Mathews's daughter Mina!

"I wonder what brings her here?" said Dan, reflectively.

"To warn us of some unknown danger," answered Trumble. "I can depend my life on her—she's as true as steel," he added, warmly.

"A pretty good sign that you love the girl," said Dan, smiling.

To this Trumble made no reply.

He went forward to meet the girl, as it was plainly apparent to all that she had beckoned him to come.

The greeting of the two was of the most friendly character.

Nat lingered with the girl some two or three minutes, grasped her hand warmly at leave-taking, then returned to his comrades.

Mina took the opposite direction, and a few moments later was lost to sight.

She had vanished with almost the same rapidity as she had appeared.

"Well," said Pinkerton, when Nat came up, "what now? Any new peril to meet?"

"Yes. The rascals are going to blow the 'Manse' up. They have decided that the country hereabouts is too hot for them. Mina, concealed among the trees, heard their plans and, when they were gone, hastened to warn us. We had better stay where we are. The den is, I understand, filled with explosives. There it goes!"

Even as Nat spoke, a terrific explosion shook the heavens!

The shock was tremendous, and the most powerful man there had the greatest difficulty in keeping his feet.

Following the explosion came dense clouds of vapor and black smoke, darkening the face of the surrounding country for miles.

When the suffocating columns of smoke had swept away, the havoc created was plainly visible. It was even more dreadful than the explosion at the tavern—mighty trees had been uprooted and scattered in all directions—and not a stone of the 'Manse' was left standing on another.

The retreat of the counterfeiter had passed away as completely as if it had never existed.

We have little more to tell than what has already been described.

The gang of counterfeiter had made good their escape after the destruction of their stronghold, for that it could be termed without exaggeration.

Mounted on swift horses, they were miles away even before the second explosion took place, and with them went Dick Harvey and a few others who happened to be in the 'Manse' at the time.

Dick had had enough of his lawless life, however, for which he was in no way fitted—and instead of going West with his guiltier comrades, he boarded an ocean steamship and sailed the same day for Europe.

Since then nothing definite has been known of him; but it has been said by Gyles Garnett that he is leading an honest life in some great English city—which is no doubt true—at least we hope so.

Among other things, Mina Mathews told Nat that her father and mother had started for one of the Territories—there to begin life anew.

Mina objected to accompanying them for many reasons, one of which was her love for Nat Trumble, to whom she was ultimately united, and still another, her recent discovery that no actual relationship existed between her and her supposed parents.

When Mathews escaped from the restaurant in R—, he got driven by a fast team to Colbeck, where he was joined by his wife.

The journey for him was a lucky one, for by going to Colbeck, he had succeeded in eluding his pursuers, and getting away from that part of the country in safety.

Then again the body of poor Joe Fales was spirited away in some mysterious manner, for when Garnett and his friends sought for it in the little grove it was gone.

Nor were the mutilated remains of the murdered detective ever found, though it was shrewdly suspected that they had been removed by some of the counterfeiter, who were glad enough to get rid of such evidences of their guilt.

Dan Manning had no hand whatever in Joe Fales's death, as was subsequently proved.

The day that Manning was liberated he left for Chicago, and started in his own business—engraving—in which he has been successful even beyond his most sanguine hopes.

As to the prisoners—Arkright and his New York thugs—they were convicted in due season, and sentenced to long terms in State Prison, where they still remain, and will remain for several years to come, unless, indeed, the law of the land changes very considerably.

And last, but not least, Gyles Garnett is to-day one of the most trusted agents of the great Pinkerton Brothers.

THE END.

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- 528 Fox and Falcon, the Bowery Shadows.
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